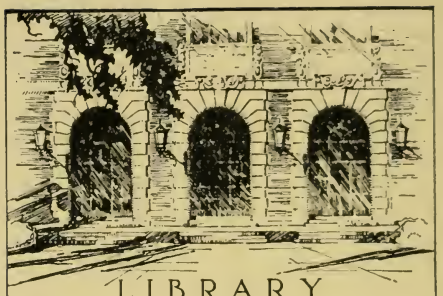

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WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL.

BY

NOELL RADECLIFFE

AUTHOR OF

"ALICE WENTWORTH,"

"THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL,"

&c., &c.

"But yet the cause and root of all his ill,
Inward corruption, and infected sin,
Not purged nor heal'd, in him remained still."
SPENSER'S FAERIE QUEEN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON.
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET,
1861.

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Wheel within Wheel.

CHAPTER I.

The astonishment with which the news of Cecilia Langton's engagement was received by all friends and connections was excessive. There seemed to be no difference in the degree, though the manner of exhibiting it naturally varied, according to the various ages and characters of the astonished persons. Mrs. Oakly, who always despaired of every woman out of her teens, became absolutely speechless; while Mrs. Spencer Langton expressed her amazement with a volubility which almost threatened an extinction of breath. Annie looked very grave, and rather disappointed; one of the younger children began to cry, because she thought she should "never see Cecy again;" and Mrs. Tynedale justified *her* surprise, on the ground of the extreme rarity of such sensible actions. Notwithstanding the visit which Lewis Markham had so prudently paid to Wyngate and its inhabitants, three weeks back, a certain dread of the awkwardness attending the next meeting, mingled itself with the surprised pleasure with which Katherine

learnt that her quiet suitor of last summer was about to be united to her old friend and future sister-in-law; while Cecilia's elder brothers, accustomed to hear her talk as if none of the chances of life could bring any change to *her* position, joined in the general wonder, although satisfied and happy to think "that Cecy was to have a home of her own, with such a good fellow as Lewis Markham." What Henry Langton said or did when the news reached him at Venice, is not exactly known; but Alexander, who had always considered his fair-complexioned, delicate-featured sister in the light of an aunt of fifty, was absolutely incredulous, and wrote to tell his friend Fred of the hoax that had been attempted to be played off upon him! Fred himself, when he next condescended to visit his family, rather took up the tone of a man of the world who is past surprise; and, whether it were from the growing pre-occupation of his mind, or from his enlarged views of life, he certainly appeared to regard the approaching marriage of "poor dear old Cecy" as less miraculous than other people did. Miraculous or no, the fact that there was to be "a wedding at Shadworth," sensibly increased the activity of daily life at Wyngate. The branch railway, which now put it in the power of the energetic to go from the one house to the other "to spend the day," was so frequently put in requisition, that all "awkwardnesses" were speedily at an end; and Katherine soon told Oswald "that Lewis Markham was so thoroughly happy, she was sure he must be an exception to the general rule, and was very much obliged to the woman who had refused him."

Annie also, now recovered from the first shock given to her feelings of high-wrought romance, acknowledged, after enjoying the honour and glory of spending a week at Shadworth *by herself*, that though Cecilia was not one atom "in love" with Cousin Lewis, she believed she was, in reality, as pleased with her prospects as Kate.

The condition of the engaged pair at Shadworth naturally presented a considerable contrast to that of the persons similarly situated at Wyngate; who, for the moment, depended almost entirely upon the will of others, while Lewis Markham and Cecilia had nobody but themselves to consult. They had, both together and separately, expressed to Mr. Langton the hope that their home would be his home for as long as he lived; and in the peaceful happiness which this proposal brought him, he rested content, and interfered with nothing. They were, therefore (as Lewis Markham expressed it), "free to be married their own way" —that is, without a breakfast, without bridesmaids, without any company whatever, except that of Cecilia's brothers, and of her godmother, Mrs. Tynedale. This arrangement appeared a very enviable one to Oswald Langton, who had been more than once heard to complain "that it really seemed as if he and Kate were going to be married simply and solely for the edification and amusement of uncles, aunts, brothers, and bridesmaids, without the least consideration for the parties concerned." But there was another, and, in his eyes, a still more enviable circumstance—namely, that Lewis Markham's entire freedom of action, combined with his opinion that short engagement

were better than long ones, had enabled him so to contrive matters, that his "very quiet wedding" was already fixed for the first of June; whereas the second week, in the same month, still remained as the somewhat indefinite point of time talked of for Oswald's own. Yet the rapid progress of affairs at Shadworth had its effect at Wyngate, albeit indirectly, in making it needful to discuss, and in some degree settle, plans which it would otherwise have been thought premature to enter upon. Mrs. Oakly always murmured "that it would be time enough to think of these things later;" but as her affairs, and her daughter's, were now in a measure bound up with those of persons of a more decided character than herself, she was forced to hear it arranged, first, that Oswald should accept the offer made him, by a relation, of the use of a very pretty cottage, near Ambleside, for the whole of June, and a portion of July, if it suited him; and secondly, that, on leaving that abode, he and his bride should proceed to Shadworth to keep Mr. Langton company, till his daughter and her husband had returned from the short tour abroad which they contemplated. Other arrangements respecting Mr. Langton, and the question if, in the interim, *he* should visit the Moat, or, on the contrary, the inhabitants of the Moat visit *him*, concerned the members of the Langton family themselves, and them only. With regard to farther plans for the newly-married pair, such as—whether, after Cecilia's return, they should next visit the Spencers, or Wyngate, or the cathedral town in the west of England, where Aunt Judith resided, Oswald was quite ready to

agree with Mrs. Oakly, "that it would be time enough to think over *them* later." The knowledge that it was admitted on all hands that the cottage near Ambleside was to be tenanted "some day before the middle of June," was a tower of strength, and provided him with a fund of good spirits, which, as he jokingly said, "must be his sole support" during an absence of a few days to be spent between Shadworth and London, which business would presently necessitate. On the morning after he had made this declaration however, Katherine was as much surprised as she was vexed, when, upon her somewhat late entrance into the breakfast-room (which Mr. Oakly had already quitted), she found Oswald engaged in a discussion with her mother, which struck her as being warmer, on his part, than any she had ever witnessed, even in the winter, when he had been most angered by the postponements of their marriage. Mrs. Oakly held one letter in her hand, and was feeling in her bag for another, which, she said, she had received the day before, and "made her," she added, "so much more reluctant than she should, at all events, have been, to see the request now made refused."

"It's impossible," said Langton bluntly.

"What is impossible, Oswald?" asked Katherine.

"That you and I should set off, after a bare fortnight at the lakes, to visit the Carews at Moreleigh Abbey, whither it seems they are going directly."

As he spoke, he turned to her a flushed, eager countenance, which said, as plainly as face could say, "*you* must think it impossible too."

"Who thinks of it? Who proposes it?" asked she, in an unfeigned amazement.

"Lady Carew herself, my dear, in a most kind letter; it's partly to you, though directed and begun to me. Take it, my dear, and read it."

Katherine received it with a trembling hand, and read it as quickly as she could read anything with Oswald watching her, as she felt he was doing. It was a very kindly-worded invitation, addressed rather to Mrs. Oakly than to herself, "because," said the writer, "I know I shall be referred to you by dear Kate for any arrangements that are to be prepared for and considered while she is still Kate Desborough, and I know you are good-natured enough to feel what a delight it will be to me to have her once again under my roof, more especially as it is utterly out of my power to meet her before her marriage, which, I hear from your son, is fixed for the middle of next month."

In the enclosed note to Katherine herself, Lady Carew pressed her to accept her invitation, not only with many expressions of tenderness, but almost as if she were calling on her to give a proof of friendship in so doing. The letter concluded with these words, "I depend on you for using all your influence with my old friend Oswald Langton, to persuade him (if persuasion be needful) how easy and how beautiful a journey it is from the Lakes to Moreleigh Abbey, where Sir Edward will be too happy to join me in welcoming you both."

"You have read it now, Kate?" asked Langton. "You don't want to go there, do you?"

"No—not the least," replied she.

"Don't you wish it, Kate?" inquired her mother, with surprise.

"No mamma, for I would rather stay the whole month in Cumberland with Oswald; and after that, you know, we are engaged to Mr. Langton, and then to you and the Spencers and Aunt Judith. It is very kind of Isabella," she added, in a constrained voice, "but I must tell her, with a great many thanks from Oswald and myself, that we can't accept, on account of engagements that must not be interfered with."

"Still, might not your visit, though not immediately from the Lakes, be made out a little later?" said Mrs. Oakly to Katherine; but looking timidly towards Oswald as she spoke. "Don't you think Mr. Langton would spare you from Shadworth, after a week, to visit such an old friend?"

"I don't know whether my father would spare us or not," Langton now burst forth, "but I *do* know I'll see everyone at Moreleigh hanged, before I go there, or Kate either!"

"Good Heavens, how you have excited yourself about this!" cried Mrs. Oakly, half shocked, half frightened.

"Oswald, dear Oswald, don't speak so violently," whispered Katherine.

At her words he commanded himself with effort; the angry glow left his brow and cheeks, and he grew perfectly pale, as, while speaking calmly, though with compressed lips, he apologized to Mrs. Oakly for his hastiness. Appeased, but not quite reassured by his submissive expressions, Mrs. Oakly now began, slowly, and the more slowly from having been put out and alarmed, to explain

her reasons for wishing that, if it were "at all possible," they *should* give a few days visit to "poor Lady Carew." They were grounded on her desire "to relieve, as far as it was in the power of her and hers, the anxiety felt by Mrs. Herbert Desborough, and her sister Mrs. Manvers, for their Cousin Lady Carew's standing in society, threatened as it was by the malice of her husband's daughter and son-in-law—the Scudamores, you know." "These things are not new to me," she continued, "I heard a great deal of them from Mrs. Manvers, when she was here the other day; but I really didn't like to tell you of them, Kate; I knew they would distress you so much—that—that I thought it better not; and I begged *her* to say nothing either. But yesterday I got a letter—here it is—from your Aunt Herbert, all on the same subject, lamenting, you see, the shocking things those people have put about to poor Isabella's disadvantage, and regretting that there should be no opportunity for some of her old friends to show, in an open, decisive way, that they feel the same as ever towards her. Now of course I had told Mrs. Manvers, when she said pretty nearly the sense of all that to me here, that none of us would be backward in doing or saying anything that might serve an innocent person slandered; and I see she must have repeated my words to your aunt, as she thanks me for them; and so indeed does Lady Carew! Look, in this sort of postscript she says to me, 'Many, many thanks, dearest Mrs. Oakly, for the kind things you said of me to Julia Manvers!' Now, after what I have said, and wishing always, besides, to do what will gratify Mrs. Herbert

Desborough, who has so much influence with your uncle, I am, I confess, sorry, since there *is* an opportunity of doing the thing they all agree in looking on as so desirable, that such unexpected difficulties should arise. I am sure I should have thought that *you*, Kate, at least, would have been willing to serve a friend!"

"And so I should be," stammered Katherine, who had, during her mother's discourse, kept her eyes fixed on the table before her, not daring to look at Oswald, "so I should be—but . . ."

"Kate is not old enough," interrupted Langton, in a decided but no longer intemperate manner; "not of importance enough in the world," he continued, "to be of use in a contingency such as your friends fear—I hope without so much cause as they imagine—for their relation. I must be in some measure a judge of these things for my wife; if, between this and our marriage, you chose to take 'Miss Desborough,' with you to Moreleigh Abbey, I could have nothing to say; but it may as well now be understood, once for all, that no 'Mrs. Langton' will ever visit there, though I have no wish to hinder Kate from writing to Lady Carew, or from seeing her, if the chances of society bring them together. I am sorry if she is unfairly run down; but I never thought her formerly, and do not think her now, desirable as an intimate acquaintance for either a girl or a young woman."

Having so said, he rose from the breakfast table, and quitted the room abruptly.

"My dear Kate, how strange Oswald is this morning! Don't you think you could get him to give up this fancy of his?"

"No, mamma, and I shouldn't like to try, for it would be useless, I feel."

"It's very sad; and not what I should have expected from Oswald; but he has got more fond of his own way lately. I am afraid Fred must be right in thinking there is a great deal of obstinacy in him."

"Oh, mamma, don't mind Fred, pray! he only says things he has been told by Isabella Carew; and she—she is not fonder of Oswald than he of her."

"Did they quarrel, my dear?"

"I think they must have done so, mamma, but really I can't tell you anything about it, for I don't know; only they have not each other's good word, as you see."

"It is so peculiarly annoying to me that Oswald won't do the kind thing," said Mrs. Oakly, plaintively; "because, as Mrs. Manvers told me, one of the assertions that ill-natured people have made is 'that no young man, who had known her in Paris, or Florence, would ever let his wife make her acquaintance.' So you perceive that his taking you to Moreleigh Abbey would be just the thing to set against such speeches as those, and would particularly please the Desboroughs, through your Aunt Herbert, who, I daresay, may have advised Lady Carew to make the invitation. Of course I can't press the matter upon Oswald, now I see the way he has taken it up—which, I confess, is not what I expected, and makes me regret the more not having spoken sooner of all Mrs. Manvers told me about the Scudamores, who, as you know, though they had been so angry at the time of the marriage, were reconciled afterwards, especially

when the child proved a girl, and there seemed no likelihood of another. But now it seems there has been some fresh disagreement about some property Mrs. Scudamore thinks herself entitled to in right of her mother, and she and her husband have taken advantage of a very disagreeable quarrel among the English at Florence, to say—what I should have thought too wicked for anyone—only that when money is in the case, there really is nothing people will not do and say! And then, as Mrs. Manvers observed, it is so easy to be critical about the young wife of an old man, unless she absolutely shuts herself up, which nobody could expect a lively, sociable creature like Isabella to do. As you may suppose, I told Mrs. Manvers how entirely I took her view and your Aunt Herbert's, and how I wished her to tell everybody that we had all sanctioned your visiting her last Spring; and now they will think Oswald is siding against her; which, after all her kindness to dear Fred—a thing we never can be too grateful for—vexes me, I must say, more than I can express."

"So it does me, mamma," replied Katherine, in a subdued tone; "yet I can't say anything in favour of the plan now to Oswald."

"No, my dear, I don't wish you; I have no desire you should get into a quarrel; but I confess I am greatly disappointed in him."

So saying, Mrs. Oakly left the breakfast-room, up and down which her daughter paced, once and again, in a tumult of thought difficult to describe; when, as she drew near the door the third time, she was met by Oswald coming in from the hall. He

took her by both hands, eagerly gazing on her, as he said:

"Oh Kate, why wouldn't you take me last June?"

"I believe I might as well, Oswald," replied she, smiling, "since I was to say 'yes' at last; but am I not as good now as then?"

"Just as good, in soul and body! better—for you are kinder to me; but the world has grown crosser!"

"What does that signify, when we are not cross ourselves?" asked she; "and what has that to do with my saying 'yes' in June or December?"

"It has this to do with it, Kate, that if you could have known your own mind then, for all the delays, and postponements, and bothers that your mother and your uncles might devise, I *must* have had you for my own by this time, and so could defy Fate."

"You must never defy Fate!" said Katherine, in a gravely warning tone; "all human creatures you may, and that as much without my having a ring on my finger as with it."

"May I, dearest?—well, I think so; but I am sorry to have offended your mother; only I could not help it. You don't regret this visit to Moreleigh Abbey, Kate, I hope—(not, mind, that I should take you there even if you did)—but do you?"

"No, Oswald; I spoke truth to mamma when I said I should like much better to stay as long as I could at the Lakes with you."

"That's a good girl! you shan't repent the preference."

"But, Oswald," said she, suddenly overcoming the shyness which had hitherto restrained her from ascertaining the amount of his "knowledge," and looking full at him as she stood encircled by his arms, "what is your reason for objecting to my intimacy with Isabella Carew?"

His answer, however, though serious and straightforward—so far as it went—threw no light on the subject she had gathered courage to enter on.

"It is," said he, "that intimacy with a woman so vain and so unguided by principle, as you know she is—whether she does or does not proceed to such lengths as the world is beginning to impute to her—can do good to no one, and may do harm. I harmed myself greatly," he continued, "at one time of my life, through seeking amusement in society which could only lower the standard of good and right within me; I have never ceased to repent it; and—please God—no being I value shall be exposed in any degree to a similar risk of deterioration. Now, dear Kate, do you, who I acknowledge have the worst of it—the most trouble of it, at least, in the present instance—go and compose a civil refusal; a business in which I can't help you."

He kissed her tenderly, and she left him to write her letter in compliance with his wish.

CHAPTER II.

KATHERINE thought herself rid of a most disagreeable task, when she had written and dispatched her letter to Lady Carew, and she enjoyed her afternoon's ride with Oswald even more than usual; partly owing to her perception of his warm gratitude for her readiness to see things as he did, partly owing to its affording her an escape from the constrained and troubled feelings caused by her mother's unabated displeasure. This displeasure was called "depression," and was generally indicated by Mrs. Oakly's not speaking above her breath, and professing herself "unequal" to whatever might be going on or proposed. It was some time now since anything connected with Katherine had affected her with a fit of low spirits; but—as if to make things even—this was a severe one; "worse," Annie observed, "than any mamma had had since Kate refused Cousin Lewis last summer."

At dinner, and in the evening, Mrs. Oakly continued to sigh as deeply as at luncheon; and either from the state of mind being infectious, or from whatever cause, Oswald Langton was also subject to long silences, almost to brown studies, and only now and then roused himself to talk to Mr. Oakly and the rest of the party, with a kind of effort after his accustomed cheerfulness. Next morning

matters were rather better; but still there was so little of that cordiality with which, foreign as it was to her nature, Mrs. Oakly had hitherto invariably treated Langton, that her daughter could not be altogether sorry he was to quite Wyngate that day, although he was, on this occasion, not expected to return till after the middle of the next week. When he came back, she trusted that her mother would have overcome, or forgotten, the annoyance she had received; and something to that effect she said to him at his departure.

"Then is your mother's looking so miserable all to be laid to the account of what passed yesterday morning?" asked he.

"I think so," she replied, "for she always makes herself unhappy when anything is done, or not done, which she fancies may displease my uncles, or my Aunt Herbert."

"And they wish Lady Carew to be countenanced; I understand;" said he to himself: "it is a strange combination! But how long are *you*, Kate, likely to have this refusal to go to Moreleigh Abbey remembered against you here at home?—that's the part of the business that provokes me!"

"I can't tell," answered she, smiling, "for it depends chiefly on whether anything happens soon, or late, to divert mamma's attention, and please her a little; but *you* need not be provoked! for the less pleasant things are for me here, you know, the better I can forgive you your hurry to carry me off—without waiting for my gowns even!"

"It is a flattering way of putting your condescension, Kate, I must own; but—I can't expect

you to enter into all my reasons—and now I must —more's the pity !—say good-bye."

When he was gone, Katherine found life flatter, by a great deal, than she habitually found it during his absences, from missing the cheerfully confidential talks which had latterly become usual between her mother and herself, both concerning her own plans and prospects and those of other members of the family. Mrs. Oakly was now silent and gloomy, saw difficulties on every subject, and though not actually unkind to Katherine, shewed her so little of the interest she had lately taken in her and her affairs, as to produce the effect of an indifference which could not but be painful to one who had been congratulating herself on receiving again the tokens of affection which she had been used to in early childhood, but had missed from her entrance into youth till her engagement to Langton. She suspected that a letter had come from Fred, but was not sure of it, though she was only too sure that her Aunt Murray's long-looked-for arrival from Scotland did not—as regarded her (Katherine)—bring about the expected change in her mother's temper and feelings. So far as outward bearing to the world in general was concerned, Mrs. Oakly was a good deal roused and enlivened by it ; but on her daughter she still cast melancholy, injured looks, which were well understood by her on whom they were thrown. Nay, even in speaking before her to Mrs. Murray of her marriage, and things connected with it, there was an indescribable air of regret and reproach, which, though not visible—as such—to those who did not habitually reside with her, spoke

to Katherine a language as plain as it was distressing.

"If I didn't expect to see Oswald on Tuesday, I should go wild!" cried she to Annie, with one of her old bursts of impatience, which had only the effect of moving her young sister to very disrespectful smiles.

"I can't help it, Kate," said she. "I'm really very sorry that mamma should be taking to think you a naughty girl over again, when, after all, it isn't your fault that you don't do what the Desboroughs wish; but it is so droll to see you catching Oswald's ways of firing up, and talking as if you couldn't live out of his sight, just as he does about you! You took things much more quietly at Christmas."

"I should take them quietly now," answered Katherine, "if I were but sure that mamma isn't perhaps getting to dislike Oswald himself."

"Oh, Kate, that can't be."

"I should have thought it couldn't be," resumed Miss Desborough, "if I had not seen how instantly upon Fred's coming here she began to make little criticisms—in themselves most trifling and insignificant—upon Oswald, and how she has always seemed to attach so much importance to his not being so much liked by Fred as—I think—he ought to be."

"I am so angry with Fred for not feeling the same towards Oswald as I do!" exclaimed Annie, vehemently.

"Yes," returned Katherine, "but *mamma* is not angry with him; she is vexed, but looks, all the time, as if she thought he might be right, and

we all wrong. I was quite on thorns during the two days they were here together, lest Oswald should notice anything in Fred's ways or looks."

"Yes," said Annie, "I know you were. But I think that was because *you* knew Fred is not so grateful as he ought to be; for, except when he was so perverse and impertinent to him (and to papa, too) about the good thing Cousin Lewis has done for Alexander, and his going out to Madras, and all that, they got on very fairly, as far as it went."

"Well, I believe they did; and it is not to be expected that Fred and a man of Oswald's age should be the most congenial of companions; still I wish mamma would not mind Fred's opinions so much! This I know, that if things go on as they are going on now, there will be no one but you, dear Annie, whom it will be a grief to me to leave, when the day of parting comes!"

"Ah, Kate, you wish for that day now, though you were once glad it was far off!"

Annie kissed her sister, with an air of tender reproach, as she spoke; and Katherine pressed her to her heart as she whispered, tremulously:

"I can't tell if I wish for or fear it most! but I feel unhappy and worried now, and so—I long to get away—no matter where—just as I used to do formerly, and had left off doing. Yet I believe it's wrong and unthankful, so I will try not. And now let us go to Aunt Murray, and take her and the girls down to the fish-ponds, if they like it."

Of her brother's disappointment on the subject of that inheritance of Aunt Judith's, respecting which she herself had been kept in ignorance up

to the time of her engagement, Katherine knew nothing, and therefore could not be aware how much this circumstance had embittered his original antipathy to the man on whom she was about to bestow her hand, and with it the promised wealth which ought (in his estimation) to be his own. She consequently attributed the dislike to Oswald Langton, of which, to her great and exceeding pain, she had perceived the increase at each recurring visit from Fred, simply to the old grudge of the previous Autumn, blown up and inflamed by the insinuations of Lady Carew. *Her* influence over him, and the manner in which she swayed his every action—nay, his every thought—had become as evident to her as if she had sat at table between Lewis Markham and the Rev. W. Burgess, while the latter was explaining to the former, what was the magnet of attraction which had caused Master Frederick Desborough to leave his tutor in the lurch. That this influence had not become also apparent to her mother, hurt as she was to find how little time her idol had to spend at Wyngate, or to her uncles, who were still sore on the subject of his returning home without their leave, was a constant matter of surprise to Katherine. But Uncle Peter, who had consented, at his brother Herbert's urgent request, to receive his nephew into his regular and well-appointed abode in Brook Street, "for as long as he went on quietly," had as yet seen no reason to alter his cautious declaration, "that *so far* Fred gave him no trouble, and appeared to frequent no objectionable company." As to Mrs. Oakly, she knew better than Uncle Peter did, how

much of her son's time was spent in the Carews' apartments at Mivart's; but what then? Fred was "always fond of those he had known in childhood, dear fellow! and Isabella had been so kind to him in Florence, he was grateful for that—and—though she *should* like to see a little more of him herself—still it was a great comfort to know he had so entirely given up the wild set he was always with last year." To her daughter, on the contrary, each meeting with her brother showed more clearly that he was in love—desperately in love—with Isabella Carew, whose insatiable vanity it doubtless flattered to see another captive at her chariot wheel. She saw he was her slave, and saw, too, that the love he cherished was, however unlawfully directed, yet mingled with a reverence for its object, which resembled the worship due to a superior being. In *his* eyes then, at least, Isabella had never lowered herself; but while thankful to believe this much, and while asking herself—as she did more than once—whether it might not be that, with regard to *her* also, evidence which was only circumstantial had been too easily accepted—her horror of that all consuming vanity did but increase. Let the rest be as it would, to this vanity, that now made her desirous of ruling in the heart of a boy, she had sacrificed her good repute in the opinion of the majority; and it was to the mortification of this vanity that Katherine, in a great measure, ascribed the sort of resentment she believed her still to nourish against Oswald. The compassion therefore which she could not refuse to so proud-spirited a woman as Isabella, when forced to

solicit the notice of former friends *as a favor*, and doomed to solicit that notice in vain, was sorely qualified. She was too generous and warm-hearted not to remember, with a pang, how this woman, whose unprincipled ambition, and more unprincipled vanity, had brought her into such a humiliating position, had once been to her the object of that violent, exclusive attachment of early girlhood, which, in its almost idolatrous devotion, may be said to partake of the nature of a passion. But she was now angry with herself for having been, as she by this time considered, cheated, the year before, into a renewal of those early delusions; and her indignation against Isabella Carew for choosing to excite and keep up in Fred a species of interest likely still farther to confound his views of right and wrong, was sharpened by the conviction that it was, in an indirect way, *her* influence which prompted the looks, the letters, and the remarks upon Oswald, that every now and then disturbed the wavering spirit of her mother.

No remarkable event occurred during the next few days; but Katherine's feelings towards Lady Carew were rather irritated than softened, by a letter from her Uncle Herbert to her mother, in which (as she emphatically informed her daughter) he expressed himself "not only sorry, but disappointed at the declining of Lady Carew's proffered hospitality; his wife," he added, "attached some importance at the present moment to whatever—trifling in itself though it were—was calculated to convince the world of the unchanged opinion held of her cousin by her old friends.

This feeling of hers being known already, he should have thought it would have had some effect on Kate, even if there should exist some little difficulty about alteration of plans, and visits to Mr. Langton's family."

"You still think it would be useless to speak to Oswald?" said Mrs. Oakly, after reading to Katherine the foregoing passages in her uncle's letter; "you don't think he would consider your Uncle Herbert's opinion, any more than mine?"

"I'm afraid not, mamma."

"Ah, so I thought!" ejaculated Mrs. Oakly, with one of her deepest sighs. "I see there would be nothing gained by renewing the subject; but I fear, Kate, you will have a great deal to contend with in many ways!" after which consolatory speech no more was said.

On the expected Tuesday, Oswald rode over from the Moat (whither he had by this time repaired), to be introduced to Mrs. Murray, as well as to see if he could get a day actually named for his marriage, and (if possible) a somewhat earlier one than had been last proposed.

In this his own immediate object he was not very successful; for Mrs. Oakly informed him "that they all depended so entirely on Fred, who had not been able, when last there, to tell her exactly what days he was certain of being free. But," continued she, with a gentle smile, and without the slightest idea that she was repeating an ungracious speech, "he has promised to let me know, when he sees his way better through his engagements."

Mr. Oakly, however, who had more than once expressed his opinion "that Fred was as likely as

not to fail them at the last, let his mother cut and contrive how she would," and who, moreover, thought Oswald Langton little short of a saint for keeping his temper while listening to this account of his future brother-in-law's condescending intentions, was more encouraging. He observed, that though nothing could be exactly decided on *then*, the definitive arrangements might be made two days later; and, at his suggestion, it was finally agreed that Langton should come over from the Moat again on Thursday morning, before returning to Shadworth, where he was to remain till after his sister's marriage. With regard to Mrs. Murray, she was so well pleased with her future nephew, as to express her approbation of him warmly when he had left them to find his way back to the Moat; and whether it were from the restoring cordial of these praises, or merely from the effect of time and chance, it struck Katherine, that evening, that her mother's face had unclouded considerably. She certainly looked on smilingly and approvingly when the wedding veil (Aunt Judith's present, which only arrived from London after dinner was over) was exhibited to the admiring eyes of the whole feminine community, and she took considerable interest in seeing it tried on, to ascertain whether Kate would look best in it according to the English or to the French fashion of veiling brides. It was probably in consequence of this enlivening of her spirits, that Mrs. Oakly next morning found herself "equal" to accompany her sister and nieces to a "show place," now brought by the railroad to an easy distance from Wyngate, and for the enjoyable inspection of which the weather happened to be

remarkably propitious. Katherine, however, who had already gone over the house and grounds of Eardly Hall more than once, was not sorry to find that Annie was in the highest degree desirous of performing the part of "cicerone" to her cousins, which arrangement would necessarily procure her a holiday, as well as a drive and some hours of amusement. It was therefore contrived, with less difficulty than sometimes occurs on such occasions, that she who wished to go should go, and she who wished to remain behind should have leave to stay at home.

CHAPTER III.

The occupation of entertaining relations staying in the house, the answering of sundry congratulatory letters, and a number of little pieces of uninteresting though needful business, had kept Katherine engaged in a good deal of wearying, fidgeting employment for the last week; and it was with real delight that she sat down alone in the library, after the rest of the party had driven off, free to read, or draw, or wander about the garden and dream, for several hours on end. She shortly remembered, however, that she had one little duty to perform, and resolved to dispatch it as soon as possible. It consisted only in the inserting a lock of her own hair, together with one of Oswald's, into a receptacle provided for the purpose, at the back of a broach, which was to be her wedding present to Cecilia; but it proved a less easy matter than she had supposed, to persuade the dark lock and the fair lock to keep their proper positions till the glass case had closed on them; and when the task was at last accomplished, she sat awhile with the broach in her hand, engaged in contemplating her work. She was partly pleased with her success, partly disposed to meditations suggested by those two locks of hair, by the

occasion on which they were to be presented, and by the last conversation she had had with Cecilia, who, in three days' time, was to become Cecilia Markham, while she herself, at their next meeting, would be no longer Kate Desborough. These reflections were every now and then traversed by her consideration of "the pity it was" that as the expedition to Eardly Hall had not been planned till after Oswald's departure yesterday, he could not know how she was being left to her own devices, and was therefore not so sure as he would otherwise have been to ride over from the Moat. "He had only *settled* to come the next day; still, he might appear;" and when, after about an hour of solitude, she heard the bell usually betokening the arrival of a guest, she concluded that it must be he, and in that supposition awaited his coming where she was. But as she listened for his step, her ear was struck by a sort of parleying in the hall, through which she seemed to recognize a voice—a woman's voice—the sound of which would have given her considerable alarm, had she not instantly told herself "she must be mistaken." Yet—as sometimes happens when we absolutely reject an impression of the senses or imagination as false, because morally impossible—it proved no mistake; for, a moment after, the servant threw open the library door, and announced Lady Carew! She flew up to Katherine and embraced her, holding her in her arms and showering on her every most endearing epithet, while she on whom these caresses were lavished stood motionless and almost breathless, unable to return them, and yet unwilling utterly to repel what seemed prompted by genuine affection.

At length, when the power of speech returned, Katherine asked:

"What chance had bestowed on her anything so unlooked for as a visit from one whom she had believed to be either in Town, or at a still greater distance, at Moreleigh Abbey?"

"My dear creature," replied Lady Carew, seating herself close to Miss Desborough, and keeping her hand in hers, "where there's a will there's a way! as I have often found, and mean you to find, too. The fact is, that learning we were not to travel to Moreleigh in one day, but to sleep at the James Carews', at Boundsworth, as to-night, I perceived that by only starting in the morning instead of the afternoon, I could branch off from Beasley in this direction, and take a peep at you, dearest (before you have ceased to be my own Kate Desborough), without being too late to meet Sir Edward at the station nearest Boundsworth by five. How lucky I am to find you! And you are the only one at home, I hear, besides Miss Freeman and the little ones! I *did* hope, for ends and aims of my own, to have met my kind friend Mrs. Oakly, too; but I am fortunate enough, and to spare, in not missing you; for I had no time to give you a moment's warning; and yet I could have so ill borne to be denied a glimpse of you; especially as you have not yet promised to spare one day out of your honeymoon, by the Lakes, for me in my English home! Town is no more endurable in England than the country is in France. I have no wish ever to set my foot in London again; so I am going back to Moreleigh with the feeling of returning to a refreshing

stillness and quiet, after the bustling dulness and uninteresting excitement of our smoky metropolis. I look forward to enjoying Moreleigh itself (I sent little Adela down there last week), and, more than that, Kate, since I have caught you, I look forward to getting you, after all, to help me to enjoy our beautiful place, by coming to see us there; for what *is* there, in truth, to prevent you?"

"There are those engagements, Isabella, that I told you of in my letter; and," continued Katherine in a somewhat embarrassed manner, "as to its being managed between the Lakes and Shadworth, Oswald doesn't think—I mean, he wishes all the time we have, to . . ."

"Be spent on him and him only! I daresay!" interrupted Lady Carew, gaily. "I am not inquiring what his fancies may be; I suppose they are like those of most lovers; but I can't help hoping—believing—that so fortunate a man as Oswald Langton, one to whom such extraordinary luck, as I must call it, has fallen, feels sufficiently what is due to her who is giving him all, to be incapable of refusing her (at the very first) one slight thing which she earnestly desires, though it should cost him some atoms of his selfish pleasure."

"I don't think Oswald is selfish," answered Katherine; "but it is his opinion, that if we shortened our stay at the Lakes at all, it ought to be in order to lengthen our visits to relations who consider that we are promising them but a short time each. I don't like saying 'No' to you, Isabella, when you ask us so kindly; but, seeing how he has made up his mind on the subject, I can't wish even to *try* and make him do what,

with every sense on his part of your and Sir Edward's hospitality, he looks upon as being out of the question."

Lady Carew was silent for some moments, and then said, in a tone of vexed emotion :

"I see how it is, love swallows up friendship—for the time, at least—and you don't care to come and see me, Kate, enough to stand the chance of Langton's giving you a sulky look or so, if you teased him into it. Don't deny, or make excuses! I understand, my dear, and I daresay you can't help yourself. While the dream lasts, it is all very well; and one does not miss the friends one loses, till—till—one awakens! as awaken we all must one fine day. But, Kate," continued she in an earnest—no longer a flippantly sarcastic tone—"though you are disposed at this moment—happily for you, in one sense—to see with the eyes, and hear with the ears, of a man I should hardly have thought so fascinating to you, still I do not—will not—believe that you can be so changed in mind as to be indeed indifferent, not only to the eager wish, but to the utter desolation and sorrow of one whom you have loved, and who has loved you—I will not say how dearly!"

As she thus appealed to Katherine's old affection, she fixed her eyes almost imploringly on hers, and her voice had a tremulous eagerness which could not fail to strike the heart of her who had also "dearly loved" Isabella Carew.

"I trust I am not so changed!" said Katherine, gravely.

"You are not—you cannot be! and satisfied as I am that you are still the same generous, warm-

hearted Kate Desborough I once knew, I do not shrink from confessing to you—humiliating though the avowal would be if made to one less noble-minded and affectionate—that my desire to see you and Langton at Moreleigh is not solely—entirely—caused by the hope of enjoying great and rare pleasure. That pleasure I do hope and long for—oh, how keenly! But Kate, dear" (and she lowered her voice almost to a whisper as she proceeded), "I am persecuted—driven to seek help wherever charitable souls will grant it me—through the malice of that daughter of Sir Edward's, of whom I once told you that I believed she was sincerely reconciled to her father's union with me! *That* was all hypocrisy; she and her husband now openly hate—publicly slander me; they have made my own relations, even, doubtful of my good name! How the Scudamores have influenced them I know not; but so it is; and, you would hardly believe it, Kate (*I* only learnt it yesterday), but Julia Manvers and your aunt, Mrs. Herbert Desborough, are now making it a condition for *their* countenancing me, that I should be able to show them that I am also countenanced by those of my friends who have known me in Paris and in Florence. You have been in my very house, perpetually in my company abroad, and I don't think you saw anything to make you ashamed of your friend. I therefore ask you now to stand forth, as *I* would stand forth to assert your virtue and innocence, were it questioned, in the only way that can avail me in the sight of a spiteful world, and selfish, cowardly relations, who will help me if you help me, but will otherwise

cast me off as a defenceless victim to the Scudamores' malice! My husband supports me hitherto; but you know the weakness of his character, and you do *not* know the power that Mrs. Scudamore now and then obtains over him. Will you save me, Kate, from obloquy—from ruin?"

"If I could but do so!" ejaculated Miss Desborough, sorrowfully.

"You can—you can!" urged Lady Carew; "you have only to show Langton the grief I see you feel, to beseech him, as I beseech you, to grant you the power of assisting your friend: is that impossible, dear Kate?"

"It would be vain," replied she, wringing her hands in despair.

"Why vain? is he too my enemy?" asked Lady Carew, flushing angrily. "Why should it," added she, in a more temperate tone, "why should it be beyond all doubt that he *must* refuse?"

"I don't know—I can't tell," murmured Katherine, scarcely knowing what she said in her agony of confusion.

"Will you promise me, at least, that you will ask him?" persisted Lady Carew.

"Yes—no—" faltered Katherine, bewildered and frightened; but feeling instinctively that the passing of her word would plunge her into a yet more inextricable maze, she added, "I cannot deceive you, Isabella. From my soul I pity you; but I dare not say another word to Oswald; he will never take me to Moreleigh Abbey."

Lady Carew had scanned her countenance, while she spoke, with a watchfully suspicious eye; but as she uttered the last words, which a burst of

tears rendered barely audible, she started from her seat, exclaiming, with a look of fury :

"Then he has told you all! False-hearted, base of soul as he is! he has boasted to his new love of his conquest over her who trusted him; he has mocked at her he had disgraced and deserted!"

Katherine would have risen, would have fled, would have rushed into she recked not what abyss, to escape from the sound of that voice, from the sense of those words! But the convulsive tremor which shook her every joint and nerve, forbade her limbs to serve her; and after uttering a faint cry, she remained in an unchanged attitude, pale and breathless, till, partially regaining her suspended powers, she panted out:

"Isabella! what have you said!"

"No more than you knew already!" cried Lady Carew. "Do you mean to pretend," continued she, as a fiendish smile curled her lip, "do you mean to pretend that when he told you I was not fit company for you, he did not tell you *why?*"

Katherine's eyes were closed, and her head leaned powerlessly against the back of the sofa she sat on; but when she had replied, in a distinct though scarce audible voice, "No—no—never," Lady Carew tried, too late, to curb her self-accusing frenzy, and would fain have attempted to unsay the fatal words through which, in her rage at deeming herself betrayed, she had betrayed herself. A something, however, in Miss Desborough's bearing soon showed her that her endeavours would be fruitless; and conscious of the impossibility of re-assuming the claims of injured virtue, which, in the blindness of passion

she had wilfully cast away, she said, with a kind of sullen calmness:

"Then you didn't hear it from him?"

"I have told you I did not," answered Katherine, unclosing her eyes, but averting them from her by whom she was addressed. "You have no right to say—to think—such things. I once suspected—then thought myself mistaken—I am now undeceived by your own lips; but no treachery of his enlightened me—never believe that! He has sins enough to answer for without!"

"Enough and to spare!" cried Lady Carew, "since, if he did not reveal the sacrifice, the recollection of it has not hindered his joining the league against me! And yet you own," pursued she, while a piercing glance of angry distrust shot again from her eyes, "you own that you suspected—whence came that suspicion?"

"It arose in Paris; that was why I refused him at his brother's. But it *was* only suspicion; time passed, I doubted its grounds, it faded away, and I entered into the engagement which your words have now cancelled."

"Cancelled!" repeated Lady Carew—a flash of revengeful joy lighting up her clouded face—"then I do not repent of the words that burst from me, albeit I am shamed, and you broken-hearted! No, as regards *you*, I *cannot* repent! For what would your lot have been, given over to a man so heartless, so selfishly incapable of the love that is due to—that is deserved by—one like you? Therefore, Kate, let the world pass what judgment it may on her who has caused the strife of plighted lovers; fear not to dissolve a tie which

for you could only be one of misery ; and I, amid my wretchedness, shall have comfort in knowing that the publishing of my disgrace has, at least, bought you freedom !"

" You might know me well enough, Isabella," answered Katherine, " to feel sure that whatever reason I give my mother and the world for changing my mind, it will not be one to compromise you. To Oswald Langton I must tell the truth."

" He will deny all !" said Lady Carew, sharply.

" I think not," replied Katherine, with assumed steadiness ; " nor, if he did, would it avail him."

After uttering these words, Miss Desborough remained motionless, her hands pressed hard one to the other, her face acquiring a look of stony insensibility, and her whole frame a rigidity which bore witness to the strong effort she made for the repression of all outward signs of emotion.

" It is my misfortune," said Lady Carew, as she moved to depart, " it is at once my misfortune and my punishment, that I cannot hope to give comfort after thus overwhelming you. My presence can but increase your sorrow ; and I hardly even dare bid you farewell."

Katherine looked up, and rather guessing the general import than following the words of what was said, forced herself to stretch out her hand, which Lady Carew held in hers for a moment, and then releasing it gently, quitted the room in silence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE pride, the indignation, the desperate striving to conceal her weakness, which had carried Katherine through her interview with Lady Carew, could no longer support her when left alone with the knowledge it had forced upon her. She buried her face in the sofa cushions, while one deep-drawn sob followed another, without a more distinct consciousness in her mind of the cause, than the sense of piercing grief, than the dread and horror of all that awaited her. The loneliness of heart in which she must thenceforward exist, oppressed her already, but she could not yet *think* sufficiently to devise the manner in which most fitly to declare her altered purpose. After a time however she raised her head, and starting from that sofa where, as she too well recollected, she had sat while Cecilia's words swept away her last lingering suspicion of that which was now incontestably proved to be true, she began to walk hastily up and down the room. "I have deserved this," said she to herself. "I rejected the use of my understanding—perverted it, rather—to stifle the voice of conscience! Had I but remained as true to myself and my resolutions in the Autumn as in the Summer, I should not now have to break a chain

which binds me with a power I little knew of then! My delusion was my own work—but—but I would I had died before I awoke from it!" She tried to check all dwelling on the past; her real business was with the future, and she endeavoured, with the whole strength of her will, so to set her ideas in order as to consider with herself how it would best become her to act. She excused herself from going into the school-room to luncheon, when summoned thither by one of her little sisters, on the ground of a bad headache, and at last, wearied out with restless pacing to and fro, flung herself into a chair by the writing-table, where, hastily opening the blotting-book, she sat looking at the sheets of note-paper within, as if the intentness of her gaze could have helped her to the composition of the letter it was needful to write to Oswald Langton. What reason she should hereafter assign to her mother, to her uncles, to Cecilia, she must not now stop to consider. She knew that the sight of the brooch, which still lay on the table, almost choked her, but she steadily averted her eyes from it; for she also knew that Oswald Langton was coming over on the morrow, in the full expectation of settling the day that should have been their wedding-day, and that if she would avoid such a communication with him by word of mouth, as her blood curdled to think of, she *must* despatch her letter that afternoon. But the very feeling of hurry helped to deprive her of all power to express that which it became every minute more urgent on her to put clearly and speedily on paper. In despair she leaned her elbows on the table and her head on her hands; her bewildered thoughts chased

each other through her mind so rapidly that she felt unable to seize and, as it were, lay hold on one of them; and she remained, she knew not how long, in utter unconsciousness of every outward sight or sound. She perceived not that the sunshine of the morning had changed into gloom; heard not the children's joyful voices as they crossed the hall to take their afternoon's walk; still less was she afterwards aware of the more distant clatter of horses' hoofs in the back yard, or even of a man's tread in the passage, till the room door opened, and Oswald Langton entered, saying gaily:

"I didn't see why I shouldn't come here to-day as well as to-morrow! But what's the matter?" added he, as she started from her seat at the table, and rushing to the farthest end of the room, stood shrinking from his approach like a frightened bird. "What has come over you, Kate?" cried he, standing still in amazement. "You don't seem half pleased to see me! What has happened? Who has been here?"

His last question was put with a harsh vehemence, which gave almost the idea of a vague consciousness; but as he spoke, he drew a step nearer to Katherine, who, moving yet farther back, and fixing her eyes on the ground, answered:

"Lady Carew has been here."

"Lady Carew!" he repeated. "What brought her?"

"The same thing she wrote about," replied Katherine, still without looking up.

"The same thing!—The visit?—but I see there is more; what has she been saying to you, Kate?"

"She has told me your real reason for not

choosing to take me to Moreleigh Abbey," answered she, now raising her eyes, and fixing them on Langton with a sorrowfully reproachful glance.

"How should she know?" asked he sharply, though turning very pale as he spoke. "Let me hear it plainly out—what did she tell you, Kate?"

"Things—things—out of my old suspicion of which I had fooled myself into a false Paradise, where I managed to believe what I wished, and no more. But the spell is broken now!" continued she, hardening herself as she spoke against the feeling she thought it a duty to stifle; "for," proceeded she, "I have proof of what was but a horrid doubt in my mind when I told you at the Moat that I could not love you!"

"So that was it!" ejaculated Langton, who now stood with drooping head, as though stunned by the words addressed to him. "I might have guessed; but it was the farthest thing from my mind. And so *she* has actually destroyed herself for the end and aim of destroying me!"

"She knows her secret is safe," said Katherine, panting for breath; "it burst from her in the belief that it had been already betrayed by one to whom —she owes—her ruin."

"Ruin! the debt's mutual, at least! for I see how it's to be paid," exclaimed Oswald, bitterly, as Katherine took from her finger a small turquoise ring he had given her, and laid it, with apparent carelessness, on the table. "I understand what that means!" proceeded he, in rising anger. "I am to be sacrificed to that woman who hates *you* as she hates me! and all in the name of the virtue and honor she never had the feeling of! I see

what you would say," continued he, with something less of vehemence, "and I know it is true that no amount of fault in her wipes mine away. I have deserved this! I have been dreading to lose you (though little foreseeing how) all these months past, out of sheer expectation of just punishment; for I attempt neither to deny nor make light of the charge she has laid against me. It's all right, I suppose, that I should suffer; yet this I will say, Kate, if I had loved you less, prized and respected you less, I should have won and worn you in spite of my sins! Had I not abhorred the thought of seeing you again under her roof; had I not loathed the idea of renewing converse or social intercourse with her, I should have granted her the countenance she wanted, instead of making an enemy of one whom I had, in evil hour, furnished with the power of harming me, and you and I should have finished our honeymoon very pleasantly at Moreleigh Abbey! After getting your refusal, she wrote direct to *me*; and upon my declaring my inability to bestow the species of assistance claimed, I received from her another letter, which—which ought, I suppose, to have alarmed me; for it might have shown me what was to be feared from one who knew no law but anger and revenge!"

"I conclude," said Katherine, in a voice which —albeit her whole frame trembled—yet sounded severely composed; "I conclude she was surprised at your feeling it impossible to submit to a state of things which she knew you had willingly consented to this time year."

"God is my witness that I did *not* consent

to it willingly! God knows—and she knows well—that I thought what I was doing bad enough, without making a cat's paw of an unconscious girl, and that girl Cecilia's friend! I was told my scruples were wasted, for that the 'unconscious girl' I dreaded the sight of, was that sort of precocious woman of the world bent on obtaining a splendid establishment 'coûte que coûte,' who would never disturb *herself* about what troubled *me!* I believed what I was told—tried to believe it, at any rate—till the night when, as I was persuading you to go to the play with that good for nothing countess, you turned round and said to me 'that I wouldn't give such advice to my sister!' You know how I afterwards besought you to leave Paris; but you cannot know how often I sought in vain to convince one so thoroughly hardened in deceit and selfishness, of the meanness of thus making use of you, of retaining you yet longer for one sole end and aim! She thought my motives were interested—taxed me with my intended 'desertion'—while I was as yet unconscious of any feeling beyond that of shame for my share in what was keeping you where it was iniquitous to have ever thought of placing you; and it was thence that the strife arose which severed us. It was so far a gain that my fetters were broken; but a link of the iron sticks round me, as it always does when one has once worn the devil's shackles, and she has caught hold of it, to torture me with as she pleases!"

"She is very wicked," murmured Katherine; "but yet," added she, in a tone of deep sadness, "she might not have become so *utterly* depraved, if . . . ."

Langton's lips quivered and his brow reddened, as though it were almost beyond his power to keep down the reply which rose to his tongue; but after a few moments' silence he said, with assumed calmness:

"Of course it would not do for me to deny what is implied; you have very sufficient reason to think ill of me; and, if you can't trust me, you are perfectly right to have nothing to say to me; only—beware, beware, lest, after driving him from you who would gladly strive life long to show himself worthy your mercy, you some day bestow your love and yourself, for all your caution and your scruples, on one just as guilty and less repentant, who has but had the luck to deceive you better!"

"Would that I could have gone on being deceived!" exclaimed Katherine, bitterly; "for then I should never have known—but now that I am no longer so blinded, how could I go to the altar with the certainty that he whom I should swear to love and honour had been the means of bringing shame and misery upon my earliest friend?"

"You would not be yourself if you did not feel so! You look at me and shrink with disgust!" exclaimed he, in a tone of hopeless anguish. "Nor can I wonder, seeing how much there is you don't and can't know. Still I repeat now—shall repeat to the day of my death—that it's hard measure to sacrifice me—me and yourself—since for all I have not deserved you, you *have* loved me, Kate!—to sacrifice us both to the spite of that falsest of women!"

"It is not for her sake," began Katherine.

"Then, for whose?" interrupted he, grasping her hand; "for mine? for your own? you shake your head. If it be for the sake of those unchangeable laws, in the violation of which you fear to become an accomplice by taking pity on the transgressor of them, I will not call your views overstrained, your standard over-exalted; but I beseech you, if ever you felt how mercy may sometimes excel justice, to pause a moment, a second, before sending one, who loves you more than his life, back into that tide of desperate recklessness, which must again absorb him who is bereft for ever of the guiding star that was leading him to safety!"

"If I did but know—" ejaculated she, tears stopping her speech.

"You know I love you, Kate! love you past all names of love! Cannot you accept deep repentance in default of blamelessness? Can you say the words 'we part?'"

"If I only knew what is right," murmured she; "if I had but space to reflect!"

"There is no time to reflect, Kate! do you hear that sound?" She listened; it was the noise of the carriage wheels, speeding up to the front-door. "By the time your mother is in the house, Kate, we must be either friends or foes—there's no choice after!"

He drew her closer to him, as he repeated again and again, "You will not say 'we part?' You will not drive me from you for ever?" If there was no reply, neither was there any repulse; and

before Katherine had found breath for utterance, she was folded in an embrace from which she only disengaged herself time enough for the turquoise ring to be safely replaced on her finger, when her mother and aunt entered the room.

CHAPTER V.

ALICIA LANGTON'S account of her brother-in-law's way of life and system of action, given in the previous Summer to Katherine Desborough, had been both inaccurately stated, and, in many points, grossly overdrawn; though it cannot be denied that a certain foundation of truth lay beneath the superstructure more spitefully than justly raised thereupon. What had been least exaggerated, was the fact of his having, in common with his brothers, started in the world with the conviction that marriage was to be left out of all his calculations; a conviction which, though resting upon grounds not *entirely* blameable or selfish, could not but work disadvantageously on the habits of thought and conduct of a man who so fully adopted it. Still, notwithstanding this partial correctness of his sister-in-law's assertions, there was a fair chance that the same mixture of principle and prudence, which taught Oswald Langton to avoid "committing himself with young ladies," would have also helped him to adhere, with tolerable consistency, to like resolutions as concerned "other men's wives." But it would have required principles far higher in degree, and stricter habits of forbearance than he had ever accustomed himself to practise, to enable him,

during his idle continental existence, to turn his back, at the outset, upon temptation from a quarter sure to lead to a description of intrigue of which he would, a few months before, have believed himself incapable. He first met Lady Carew in Paris, having hitherto known her by name only, as being the Miss Walpole who had, two or three years back, made the most splendidly mercenary match of the season; which knowledge, joined to the manner in which she used the fact of his being a countryman, as a pretext for dispensing him from passing through those stages of acquaintance usually preparatory to intimacy, emboldened him to regard her less—as what she really was—by birth and actual position, than in the more familiar point of view of a young beauty, *literally* sold to a wealthy greybeard, and desirous of indemnifying herself accordingly. She was, on her part, utterly without principle; and being also without the consistent pride, or the hard-headed coolness, which, as far as this world is concerned, may often supply the place of virtue, she was now finding herself, after more than two years' experience of every satisfaction which sheer wealth could afford, tired of all it had procured her, and disposed to throw herself headlong into any course which had novelty and the interest of strong emotions to recommend it. Little prophetic skill would therefore have been needed, in one who knew her fully, to predict the result whenever she should come across an admirer who happened to combine the qualities fit to excite her vanity, with the fiery passion and resolute will needful to profit by the same. Such an admirer she found—or

sought rather—in Langton, who, though struck, as no beholder could fail to be, with her matchless grace and beauty, had by no means pressed forward, at the first, with the homage she considered her due. It may have been, indeed, that it was his indifference in the beginning, which rendered Lady Carew's acquaintance with him so fatal to that fidelity to her marriage vow, which she had, up to that time, maintained; for this very neglect so provoked her desire of conquest, as to induce her to assail him with every engine that coquetry of the most refined nature permits of; and, the challenge once accepted, Langton's "success," as it is called, was rapid. It was then that, under the spell of her every charm, he grew to believe that he had originally done Lady Carew great injustice; that she was as amiable in disposition as lovely in person; that she had, in fact, but a single fault, and *that* fault one which he, at least, was bound to consider as rendering her the more interesting. This persuasion, pleasant while it lasted (though calculated to sharpen Oswald Langton's frequent pricks of conscience), received, however, as time went on, such and so many shocks, as to render the connection they had entered into, one of very unequal satisfaction to the pair. The difference in their previous views and natural dispositions was, in fact, so complete as almost to reverse in them the state of feeling which might be expected to belong to each, in quality of man and woman; for, while Lady Carew, whatever she might occasionally affect for the end of keeping alive a sentimental interest, was, at bottom, fearless and careless of everything,

save a "discovery" of her intrigue by the world or her husband—with the lover it was far otherwise. He, from natural openness of character, which rendered the compulsory dissimulation of his present position abhorrent to him, and from inability to efface from his mind the traces of a standard of right once deeply imprinted on it, could find, after the first intoxication of favour showered on him, no delight capable of long outweighing the thorough dissatisfaction with himself and his way of life, which he vainly tried to stifle in the pleasures that cost him so dear—to hide under the mask of caustic worldly wisdom and sarcastic fastidiousness. The first lessening of the enthusiastic affection with which his mistress had inspired him, was caused by his perception of her absolute indifference to truth and falsehood, and by his witnessing the light-hearted ease wherewith she seemed to take pleasure in contriving stratagems, and weaving ingenious deceptions of every kind. This feeling was brought to a pitch little short of disgust, when she one day proposed to him "to make himself a little more necessary to Sir Edward;" and it was his absolute refusal to enact that most degrading of parts, which led to Lady Carew's devising (as the next best expedient for obtaining her purposes) that invitation to Katherine Desborough, which produced so much difference of opinion between them. Already ashamed and wearied of the post he occupied, a certain alteration of manner became visible to his mistress, who, watchful and suspicious in reality, as she was careless and easy in outward seeming, soon accused him of infidelity, before he had even

contemplated it; and thereby hastened—if she did not create—the change she dreaded. Discord having once sprung up, quarrels grew more frequent and more serious; and an attempt to use Neyrac as a means of exciting Langton's jealousy, only precipitated an angry explanation at that party at Mrs. Harford's, at which Katherine's attention was first drawn to the extraordinary encouragement given to the Vicomte. On that occasion, Lady Carew told Langton "that she had been mistaken—disappointed—in him, and had no desire to see more of one so incapable of the devotion real love teaches."

The scornful declaration was probably uttered in that sort of jealous fury, under which there always lurks a secret hope of provoking a disculpation; but the time for such results was past; no tender disculpation came from Langton's lip, and Lady Carew followed up the words which had thus "rendered him free," by a haughty request for the restitution of certain letters and love tokens which had been exchanged between them. It was in obedience to this command that he was proceeding to Lady Carew's boudoir on that memorable day, when his momentary pause to contemplate the reflected image of Katherine, revealed his presence to her, and forced him to enter the music-room, where he was soon led into a betrayal of his feelings he had by no means contemplated. His intention had been to wait till he could address her he loved in her own home—her own country, at least; but wiser men have been hurried on by chance and opportunity; and his want of caution was punished by exciting in

Lady Carew—while Katherine was still subject to her control, and in a degree to her influence—that bitter resentment, that longing for jealous revenge, which inspired her with a desire, as keen as it was abiding, to hinder his ever obtaining possession of the woman to whom she complained of being "sacrificed." The tête-à-tête walk in the Park of St. Cloud (to which she condemned herself as the only effectual means of dividing him from Katherine) was an exception to the general rule laid down in the Latin grammar respecting the "quarrels of lovers;" for, assuredly, theirs were no "renewal of love." They was simply a renewal of what had previously passed at the Harfords', with the addition of fresh taunts, and of ironical counsels to "try his fortune at once, and see how he would be received," which, however, did not prevent his doing so—as far as space and time permitted—that very evening. But when, after Katherine's departure, Lady Carew assured him, at their final interview, "that Miss Desborough had left Paris chiefly to avoid him," the statement tallied so much too well with his remembrance of the manner in which his speeches at Belle Vue had been replied to, and with his still fresher impression of the stiffly-amazed look with which his bow at the "Barrière" had been returned, that, in spite of his informant's being what he knew her to be, he believed what he was told; and, instead of starting instantly for England, accepted a friend's invitation to accompany him on a ten days' tour in Brittany. Cecilia's letter, nevertheless, by which he learnt, on his return to Paris, that she, "who was so

absolutely determined against him," was now in his own brother's house, revived the natural hopefulness of his disposition, and the boldness with which he was wont to carry through his purposes. He therefore hastened to take his departure, rejoicing in the freedom which, as he confessed to himself, he owed rather to good luck than to any skill or merit of his own. A longing desire for his native country, and for the presence of those dear to him, had sprung up in his heart simultaneously with his love for Katherine Desborough; and when he touched English ground, he felt, for the moment, as if he were rid of all that it was unpleasant to look back upon. What he heard—or understood, rather—from his sister at Shadworth, increased his hopes of success; nor did he, while they lasted, think much more of the maze of evil in which he had been wandering, than of a hateful dream from which he had wakened, or, at worst, of a painful captivity from which he was thankful to be released. But it was otherwise after the disappointment of his expectations; for not only was his mind at times assailed by a vague instinctive notion of some—to him inexplicable—concatenation of cause and effect between his own past actions and the blow he had just received, but his more sober reflections brought before him a restrospect of his life (particularly of the foregoing year) little calculated to afford him satisfaction. The monitor within had never entirely slept; and its painful revival led him, during his Summer spent at Shadworth, to look back so remorsefully on his wasted life, as to be oppressed, at intervals, with the feeling that nothing ever would or could go

well with one who had so sinned, in spite of better knowledge. He had too much elasticity of mind and temperament for this impression to be constant, or for it to come in the way of his profiting by every means of pursuing the object he had in view; but no sooner was his engagement to Katherine a settled thing, than the dark shadow returned on him at every moment of possible doubt or fear. This it was which lent such a feverish anxiety to his perception of the slightest difficulty; and this it was which sometimes rendered him, in the eyes of those around, childishly impatient of delays to which he would have submitted, rationally, at least, had his mind been unclouded by the dread of being, after all, judged unworthy of so much happiness. That Katherine's "doubt of his principles" was in any way connected with matters allied to the truth, he never guessed; for he suspected, both from the wish expressed "that he should not seek to investigate the cause of her change of feeling," and from her never volunteering to speak of her late hostess, that the "doubt" in question had, in spite of that fact's having been once denied, originally emanated from *her*. This disinclination, on Katherine's part, to allude to things verging on "unsafe" subjects, was an inexpressible relief, since, when he could forget, all was well; but when he remembered, he fell a prey to melancholy, and to painful forebodings of every kind, so mingled and concentrated as to assume the shape of a fear—an expectation—a positive dread of coming retribution. This, however, was in him a feeling (he sometimes called it to himself a superstition), not

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an apprehension grounded on just causes; and when he replied to Lady Carew's letter, to the effect "that she might command from him any service that could be rendered by him *alone*, but that in what affected the actions of another, he was not equally free," he did so without any increase of the species of anxiety which often fretted him. So little, indeed, are we given to perceiving the precise point whence danger really threatens, that even the extreme violence of Lady Carew's reproaches for his refusal, failed to produce any peculiar alarm; for he did not know (the writer did not then know, herself) how the sudden fear of losing the countenance of her relations would determine her on the bold attempt of extracting from Katherine, in a personal interview, the promise she required, or how, on the failure of that attempt, she would be surprised into an admission which few women, however guilty, have been known voluntarily to make.

Lady Carew quitted Wyngate, baffled indeed as regarded her actual object in going thither, and shamed, moreover, in the eyes of one whose adoration had formerly given her sincere pride and pleasure; yet she carried away with her her own consolation, and she proceeded to Moreleigh Abbey, exulting in the belief of having (albeit at the price of name and fame) wreaked her vengeance on the man who had scorned her. He, nevertheless, had escaped the full effects of her vindictive rage; for he had, by sheer vehemence, borne down Katherine Desborough's scruples; but when, having lingered just so long as civility required after Mrs. Oakly's return, he found

himself speeding to the Moat on his grey, his feelings, as he thought over the last hour spent in the Wyngate library, were not unlike those of a man who looks back, in bewildered horror, on the gaping chasm he has lept over when pursued by a relentless foe.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was with strangely mingled feelings that Oswald Langton (according to agreement made), came early next day to Wyngate. He was oppressed by a sort of timidity he had never before experienced, and yet determined to struggle against that sensation, and every other impediment, in order to ensure himself, as definitively and as speedily as man could do, against all further chance and change. A letter from Fred, received by his mother the previous afternoon, had given her the impression that he would be "a good deal with them now;" and this circumstance the better enabled Langton, with the powerful aid of Mr. Oakly, to bring her, after much vacillation between Thursday the thirteenth and Saturday the fifteenth, to declare that the Thursday (that day fortnight) would be the most convenient for the wedding. This point once decided in Mr. Oakly's study, and the fitting hopes expressed, "that Mr. Langton, and Alexander also, would now promise to join the family circle at Wyngate, on the tenth or eleventh at latest," the matrimonial committee adjourned to the breakfast-room, where Katherine, her Aunt Mrs. Murray, and her cousins had already assembled. Oswald's meeting with Katherine took place therefore in public, and it was not till within a few

minutes before his departure for Shadworth, that they found themselves alone together.

"I trust you have not repented, Kate," exclaimed he, anxiously.

"No, Oswald," answered she, mildly; but with so melancholy a look that her lover added, as he gazed on her:

"I believe I ought not to be surprised if you had; but repent or no, you look wretched, and I see you have slept no more than some other folks who had no right to sleep! It's hard the innocent should suffer for the guilty."

"I shall be happier in time," she replied.

"If I didn't think you would, I should hate myself worse than I do!" rejoined he. "But have they told you all is settled—and for this day fortnight! Does that displease you, Kate? I am half-frightened at succeeding so well, when I—but you know I could not go back from what I had kept urging before, even if I had wished it."

"No, you could not," said she, "and—for some reasons—I believe the sooner all is done the better."

"Dear Kate, you talk as if you were going to the scaffold! and to be sure," continued he, after a moment's pause, "if you believe that one's fortunes are at all measured in this world by one's deserts, the linking of your fate with mine can be no enlivening prospect!"

"But when our fates are so linked, we shall bear together whatever is appointed us!" cried she, warmly.

"If *you* take that as a comfort," returned Langton, "there is no evil I fear for myself; I am only

—as I said before—frightened at being too happy, not that I shall be so, Kate, if I find you, when I come back, worn to a shadow with thinking over yesterday! I hope to be here again on Monday, but if not . . . Oh, I had forgotten I was to carry that," continued he, as he received from Katherine the brooch with the two locks of hair—her wedding present to his sister. He stood lingering with the small case in his hand, in which he turned it from side to side, and said in a muttered tone, without lifting his eyes:

"You have been very confidential with Cecy, have you not, Kate?"

"I have, it is true; but," continued she, "of the name—of the person—she is totally ignorant; besides that she would believe nothing of it herself; and it was *that* more than anything that helped me to—to . . . ."

"To deceive yourself, you mean!" ejaculated he, scarcely above his breath. "Poor dear Cecy! what do I not owe her? But it is an inexpressible relief to me to find that she is not as yet aware of anything that might enlighten her; for the future," proceeded he, turning upon Katherine a countenance which bore witness to a mind lightened of its care in no small degree, "I know I can trust you! And now, dearest, I must go, though I have never said—never shall say in words while I live—what I ought to say. But you don't know what a good deed you have done by me, Kate!"

* * * * *

"My enemy has done her worst, and failed!" said Langton to himself, over and over again, while journeying between Wyngate and Shadworth;

nor was his mental ejaculation made in exulting triumph, or in scornful security; but rather in the hope, by its constant repetition, of laying the spirits of doubt and fear, which, so soon as he had lost sight of Katherine, threatened to beset him anew in a thousand—indistinct—but ever gloomy and malignant forms. He strove hard to prove to his own mind, that—barring the usual human chances of life and death—there was nothing and no one that could—according to reasonable probabilities—spring up to stand in the way of his happiness. Yet he feared, in spite of "reasonable probabilities;" and so little could either the efforts of his understanding, or the recollection of Katherine's constancy and tenderness avail to tranquillize him, that he was literally glad, on reaching his father's house, to find that there awaited him so much of actual business, so many letters to read and to write, such calculations to go over, as *must*, by claiming his entire attention, forbid any portion of it from straying into regions haunted by perturbing images. He was scarcely a moment alone with Cecilia that afternoon and evening; nor did he wholly and absolutely regret that it so chanced; for if, on the one hand, he felt more than ever drawn towards her by a deep sense of gratitude, as well as by spontaneous affection, on the other, his fear of "saying too much," if he trusted himself to express what his heart overflowed with, prevented his overcoming the new kind of shyness that affected him, sufficiently to *seek* for the "tête-á-tête," which he nevertheless painfully missed.

The next day brought with it little pause in

matters of business; it was—if possible—one of greater bustle than the preceding one; and Lewis Markham's appearance (he had returned to Fenhurst only the day before), as well as that of lawyers and settlements at Shadworth in the afternoon, was not likely to increase opportunities for quiet conversation between the brother and sister. Still less was the chance of any such occurring furthered by the arrival, about an hour before dinner, of Mrs. Tynedale; not long after whom, Spencer and Alexander Langton presented themselves together. The party at table was a lively one; but in the evening, after Markham had taken leave early, in order (as he said) to play a farewell game at chess with his aunt, the spirits (or tongues) of those he left seemed to flag, till it occurred to Alexander that his father, Mrs. Tynedale, Spencer, and himself "might as well employ their time with a rubber at whist; for," added he, "I don't believe Oswald and Cecy will mind being left out." Cecilia certainly did not mind; and when the quartett were duly established with cards and lights round the green table, at the farther end of the room, she occupied herself in the careful wrapping up of a variety of little gifts—some intended for old servants, some for humble friends in the village, on each of whom she wished to bestow a remembrance at once suited to the age and habits of the receiver, and gratifying as tokens of having been "thought of by Miss Langton the very night before her wedding." She was beginning to put directions upon her numerous packets, when Oswald, who had for some time wandered restlessly about the

apartment, now taking up books and papers he almost instantly laid down again, now watching the whist-players, now examining the barometer, stopped, as he was passing her table, to see what she was so busy with. He sat down, and looking on attentively while she proceeded with her work, he observed, as she neatly sealed and directed her last parcel, "that she must be, he supposed, a very uncommon creature."

"What, because I am making a few presents?" asked she, smiling.

"No, not because of that; Alicia would do as much, as far as the mere present-making goes. The uncommon part of the story is giving your whole heart to the doing a kind thing in the kindest and neatest manner, just as if your credit was staked on the satisfaction those trifles are to afford, just as if you had no affairs or interests of your own to take you up."

"Why, how complimentary you are growing, Oswald!" returned she, looking up gaily. "I must be getting some reflection of the pretty speeches Kate inspires you with! But in good earnest, I have not the merit a bride of twenty might have, in not being absorbed in my own concerns; for, though I don't think many are happier than I, a young girl's feelings are naturally quicker, and so she can't help being, for the moment, a little self-engrossed; not that I think Kate is at all that, or has ever been so."

Her brother did not seem to hear the latter part of her speech, and was silent for some moments after she had concluded, when he suddenly exclaimed:

"I am so glad to hear you say so frankly how happy you are! and, to be sure, you look it!" added he, gazing on her sweet and serenely gentle countenance, which might truly have served as model for the ideal representation of peace and calm happiness.

"Dear Oswald, I couldn't well help being happy! unless, indeed, I had been possessed by Alicia's theory about first loves, or been disturbed by the notion of the neighbours possibly saying Lewis was marrying me out of pique. I am very happy; and perhaps am the more conscious of my happiness, because—I may tell you now it can't vex you—though I wished so eagerly for your marriage, still, as the time for it drew on, I could not escape a sort of lonely feeling—a sort of doubt as to how I could bear losing you entirely out of my home—and I believe that has made me doubly grateful to Lewis for asking me to share his. It was natural it should, I think."

Her brother took her hand and pressed it long and warmly, saying as he let it go:

"I believe I am an abominably selfish fellow."

"You are a very self-accusing one at least, to night," said Cecilia; "but the truth is we are all selfish, more or less, I am afraid."

"Perhaps—in a certain sense," replied he, rising and pacing up and down between the window and fireplace; "but I have been extra-selfish; that is, self-engrossed to the pitch of ingratitude—never considering anything but my own success, without its ever occurring to me in the point of view in which it would affect you, while all the time . . "

"My dear Oswald," interrupted his sister, "if

you had been occupied by all those considerations, you wouldn't have been in love; it was impossible they should strike you in that manner when your whole soul was filled with something else."

"My soul was filled with what I should never have obtained but for—" he checked himself, fearful of any allusion to the last Autumn, and then went on—"I believe I never exactly told you—how you—things connected with and hanging on you—were the means of my getting to know Kate in Paris, and of her knowing me; without that we should have stood at gaze for ever—so, if I have her, it's thanks to you, Cecy dear!"

"*If* you have her!" cried his sister, struck—alarmed almost—by the passionate emphasis of his tone. "What makes you speak so, when the day is fixed, and my father actually invited? Has any fresh difficulty been made—by the Desboroughs—by anyone?"

"Oh no! the Desboroughs have been pretty quiet, considering all things; only there is always chance and change to be allowed for, as I have often heard you say, Cecy."

"Yes; and I suppose that, according to your nature and circumstances," returned Cecilia, with a musing look, "it is to be expected that the nearer you are to what you have been so long seeking, the more restlessly eager, the more painfully anxious you should be. I understand it, though I am myself so different; but I am glad there is no real cause. I thought of the Desboroughs partly because we naturally associate the idea of all difficulties with them; partly because, from what Mrs. Tynedale has been telling me, I

find they have been wanting you to take Kate to the Carews', and wonder at your declining! I am so pleased with you for being firm on that point! for, do you know, I never could bear her intimacy with that Isabella Walpole."

"No more could I," replied Oswald; adding, "that he intended to follow his own views in that matter, cost what it might."

"You mean," said his sister, "that you would take the risk of quarrels with the family, rather than yield such a point; and you are right; though I trust neither the Desboroughs nor Mrs. Oakly will urge you farther. I believe that if Lady Carew's character was doubtful last year, it is now *beyond* doubt that she is everything you and yours should shun; though I am not sure, Oswald, that if it had not been for her, you would ever have come across Kate!"

"Or you have been engaged to Markham?" rejoined her brother. "And it is certain," proceeded he, reflectingly, "that the combinations, as I have often thought before, have been very curious, though they did not, at one time, seem to promise much good."

"Still all has been for the best, whencever it came," said his sister, with a calm smile.

"I hope so!—I trust so!" cried he, earnestly: "at all events," added he, as he again took her hand, "I wish you to know and to remember, life-long, that for whatever happiness I own, I do—and always shall—thank you, Cecilia."

He left her hastily, to go and stand behind the card-table, while his sister said to herself:

"I should never have thought a man of such a

steady, and—usually—such a hopeful mind as Oswald's, could be so overpowered—so unnerved! He looks worn and ill too," thought she, following him with her eyes, "and he can't sit still a moment—there must have been more serious differences with the Desboroughs—and involving more—than he likes to allow. If he had only chosen of old to meet Kate in her own home, as he might—naturally—neither he nor she could have been called on to stand up for that woman, the question couldn't have arisen! I feel sure Oswald has been fighting some very hard fights! Yet 'all's well that ends well!' and when Lewis and I come back from our tour, we shall find him as sober and sensible as ever!"

CHAPTER VII.

A LETTER from Cecilia, which had reached Wyngate by the second post of Thursday, arrived very opportunely, inasmuch as the intelligence it contained—namely, "that unexpected business would oblige Mr. Langton to claim Oswald's presence till Tuesday next certainly, probably till Wednesday"—appeared, both to Mrs. Oakly and to Annie, enough of a disappointment for Kate, to account for her complete lack of spirits. This impression of theirs was the more fortunate because, as Mrs. Murray and her daughters had left Wyngate that same afternoon, to spend a few days with the Selwyns, those who remained had more leisure for observation, and might—had it not been for their own way of explaining matters—have asked questions which would have added embarrassment to irritation and sorrow. As it was, Katherine was left to her reflections, which remained bound to the one subject that had filled her mind for the last twenty-four hours, intermingled with every perplexing and afflicting thought suggested by it. Had she done well or ill? She knew not. She only knew that, whatever it might have been when she first agreed to engage herself to him in the Autumn, to part from Oswald *now* was beyond her strength. She could not regret having taken

pity on him in whose repentance she believed, and in whose love she trusted entirely; but she could neither free herself from the doubt lest she might have decided rather through weakness than mercy; nor escape from a sense of terror and repugnance at the idea of joining her lot to that of the man who had—under whatever temptation—been the direct means of fixing into incurable evil the wavering will, and yet uncertain destiny, of one who had been dear to her.

"When I am once his wife," thought she, "there will be an end of all this; for let me be right or wrong now, my duty will then be clear and unmistakeable. I must then think the best, hope the best, look forward instead of backward; and I can then no longer feel the distracting uncertainty whether I ought to love him, which torments me, and would drive me from my senses, if it lasted long!"

She had been much moved by his brief conversation with her that day, and was even ready to reproach herself for not having shown him as much tenderness as she afterwards thought he deserved; yet, in spite of that feeling, she was not sure that she wished for his immediate presence, and was almost inclined to believe that, as things stood, the prolongation of his stay at Shadworth was not entirely an evil. But if she could think this for reasons entirely connected with herself and her own disturbance of mind, the sudden and unexpected appearance of Fred, about half-an-hour before dressing-time, brought her to consider Oswald's absence as a positive good. The unfavorable view brothers are apt to take of their

sisters' suitors (of which few women escape being made painfully aware) was, in Fred Desborough, exaggerated to a pitch of bitter aversion. Jealous as well as arrogant in no common degree, it would at all times, and under all circumstances, have been odious to him to find in his home that anomalous being, on whom the attention of all is centred; who is, and is not, of the family; who enjoys most of the privileges of a son, without relinquishing those of a guest; and to whom, therefore, the son of the house must needs yield the first place. Now to yield the first place was gall and wormwood to Fred Desborough; how much more so, when he was, as he well knew, expected to feel *gratitude* towards the man who was not only thus in his way, but was also to reap the whole advantage of what he—Fred Desborough—had a better right to than his sister! In his own mind, and in company with Lady Carew, he invariably designated Langton as a "knowing fellow;" one who had the wit to know where he could best "feather his nest;" and in his private colloquies with his mother, he rarely let slip the opportunity of dropping words which, if not so strong, at least insinuated ideas to match those expressions. They had not, as yet, borne all the fruit that might have been expected; but their poisonous seed always planted suspicion and discontent in Mrs. Oakly's mind; and though (in spite of her habitual indiscretion) she never *precisely* informed her daughter of what her brother had said, the effects of his influence were apparent to Katherine after his every visit. To add to these disagreeables, there was just that amount of un-

congeniality between him and Langton which rendered it so generally likely that they would (as in the matter of the cadetship for Alexander) take opposite views of anything under discussion, as to keep up a constant alarm in those who would have been annoyed by their differing seriously. Katherine's anxiety on this point was the greater, as Oswald, who, had he known the full measure of Fred's irritability, would have been on his guard not to excite it, was ignorant of being an object of actual dislike in his eyes ; while she feared to enlighten him, lest she should thereby turn that which might be a passing prejudice on her brother's part, into a mutual and lasting enmity. Almost the first words Fred Desborough said to his mother, in his sister's presence, were :

"I'm off to Moreleigh Abbey the day after to-morrow. It's all settled, I suppose, about Kate's going there now—after the Lakes, that is, of course."

"I'm afraid," replied Mrs. Oakly, "that it is not likely. Your sister and I have done what we could (I was so anxious for anything that Mrs. Herbert Desborough attached importance to), but I can't say Oswald has shown himself so obliging as usual on this occasion ; nor as kind as I should have expected (especially considering *she* is a friend of Kate's !). I do so wish he had only ridden over an hour or two earlier from the Spencers', for then he would have met Lady Carew here, and he *must* have accepted an invitation by word of mouth !"

"Then," asked Fred, turning quickly round to Katherine, and either not seeing, or not heeding,

the scarlet flush which colored her face and neck at her mother's speech, "then she *has* been here? I knew," proceeded he, "that she meant it if she could. And is it possible, Kate, that you can have refused what has been asked so repeatedly and so kindly?"

"I had no choice," answered she.

"No choice!" he repeated; "that is very extraordinary!"

"My dear Fred," interposed his mother, who was already putting away her work, "you know your sister is not exactly a free agent: Women," continued she, with a sort of melancholy smile, as she left the room, "women have to obey their lords and masters, you must consider."

"Lords and masters, indeed!" cried he, the moment she was gone. "I must say, Langton has begun taking up his rights as such, uncommonly early! It's so selfishly obstinate of him to hinder your going there!—in your place, Kate, I shouldn't think much of the attachment of a man who yields so little at the very outset!"

"I have not made it a point with Oswald," replied she, in some confusion, "and now I believe —I know indeed—that it would be useless."

"Very odd that you shouldn't have made it a point! when you know—at least my mother knows, I'm certain—how desirable it is that the Scudamores should see—ay, and her own relations too —that there are those who will stand up for her, as everyone ought, when she is run down in the shameful way she is, all through spite and envy! I had no idea of such lukewarmness on your part! *I* told her—what I really did gather from my

mother's letters—that if it depended on you, the visit would be paid; and then thinking, of course, that since that was the case, all that was wanted was for you to tease and coax Langton rather perseveringly for an hour or two, she came here (all this round out of her way), mainly on the strength of what *I* had said, and to no purpose! I don't know when I have been so vexed! I wish to Heaven I had known better what a set you are down here, thinking of your own pleasure and convenience, and nothing else; for then I shouldn't have let her depend on you! The situation is most awkward and painful for me."

"I am very sorry for it, Fred," said his sister—who perceived that her mother had, by way of smoothing things to her darling, made the most she possibly could of the wish to accept Lady Carew's invitation, which she attributed to her—"very sorry indeed! But tell me," continued she, moved by a sudden impulse to speak her mind on *one* point at least, "has Lady Carew—has Isabella talked to you *herself*, of the private reasons she has for wishing us to go there?"

"Why shouldn't she? She knows I'm to be trusted! She knows I'm a friend! and she has not many, poor thing! She is so frightfully envied!"

"It is most unfortunate," returned his sister; "but you are very young to be made a confidant of—on such subjects—by one who knows she is already so much criticised."

"More shame for them that criticise her!" cried he, vehemently, "and more shame for you, Kate, to find fault with her taking the little comfort she

can, in speaking out the misery those wretches cause her, to one who can sympathise, though he is not come to the age of Methuselah! But I know you don't take up these notions of yourself; it's all priggery you have learnt from Langton!"

"Indeed, Fred, Oswald does not even know how intimate you are with the Carews."

"Oh! I suppose you wouldn't shock him with the information! Perhaps he'll object to *my* going to Moreleigh Abbey!"

"He never interferes with—never thinks of—where other people go," replied Katherine; "he has never said a word about the Carews in connexion with you! But, my dear Fred, are you wise in letting yourself see so much of one who—who is so extremely fascinating—and yet is fettered—not free to—"

"Kate, when I want advice, I'll ask for it! Neither you nor Langton, nor anyone in the world, can form an idea of the sort of feeling that rivets me to her whom you would have me join the base multitude in shunning, after receiving at her hands kindness and hospitality *I*, at least, can never forget! Is it possible *you* can be worked on by the foul slanders framed against her? Can *you* look on Isabella Carew as one whose acquaintance is dangerous for your brother?"

"Without regarding those slanders—without having ever heard of them—I might still think it dangerous for you—dangerous for your happiness, Fred! Are you angry with me for thinking of that?"

"My happiness is to see her as often as she will let me; to serve her in all things within my power! My reward is in her perception of my devotion;

and my hope and endeavour is to make all others acknowledge that she is what *I* know her to be, and what no one would ever have doubted her being, but for the baffled presumption of some men, and the low envy of some women!"

As young Desborough thus poured forth the expression of his passionate admiration, as well as of his almost devotional worship of Lady Carew, his sister sat contemplating with painful wonder, the look of enthusiastic pride with which he boasted of his idolatry, and confessed to herself that she might as well have addressed warning words to the raging torrent or the devouring fire, as to the unbridled mind and enslaved heart of her brother. She did not immediately speak; when she did, it was to say, with as much steadiness as she could command:

"I see it is useless to attempt putting these things before you in a different light; but I cannot help being sorely grieved; and I trust all this may not lead to great misery."

"I conclude it has already led," answered he, disdainfully, "to your taking up the narrow-minded fear that inclines you to draw back from your friend, and give in to Langton, which is no small unhappiness to me. I should have thought, Kate, that you would have had more elevation of mind, more capability of believing that virtue, the highest and most refined, may exist without all those cowardly fencings and hedgings, which may be necessary, for aught I know, to some natures, but are not needed by those who possess inborn purity and loftiness! I verily believe your not going to Moreleigh Abbey—your not *trying* to get yourself

taken there, at least—is owing to your dread of sanctioning what you are pleased to think 'a perilous intimacy' between your friend and your brother! I congratulate you on your opinions, if they are really your own; I congratulate you still more, if they are adopted in consequence of your moulding yourself more completely, day after day, according to the bias given you by such a suspicious, evil-thinking individual as, I confess, I never expected to see make his way into our family."

"You are in a passion, Fred, and don't, I believe, feel the bearing of all you say; but it is very unkind to speak so to me of Oswald!"

"Well, I suppose it is," answered he, a little softened by the gentleness of her tone and manner. "I ought not to abuse him—there is nothing against him, in the usual sense, and you are attached to him; but you know, Kate, I can't pretend to like what I don't like, and the truth is, I think you too good for him. *She* thought so from the first moment she heard of your engagement. She said 'he would bring you down to his own level,' and I would have you take care lest he do so."

As he spoke he quitted the room, leaving Katherine in a state of glowing indignation against Lady Carew, which threatened to outweigh every other feeling which had oppressed her for the last four-and-twenty hours. That Frederick should admire her was natural; but that he should have been deluded into so romantic an admiration, as well as kindled into so extravagant a passion for her whose coquetry towards others he must have witnessed,

was only explicable by supposing her to have expended considerable art and pains on the process of blinding him to what she really was, while his imagination was growing more and more impressed with what he believed her to be. It was evident she could sometimes acquire (and retain) immense influence, without having to pay its usual price; perhaps it was easier to do so with a stripling like Fred, than in dealing with one older and more determined. The instinctive feeling of this chilled Katherine with unspeakable pain; for it renewed within her the thought that, had Isabella been spared the utter loss of self-respect, she would hardly have, thus early, degenerated into a being so unscrupulous, so ready for any meanness and any treachery that might further her interested or spiteful aims. That she had used—would probably again use—Fred for such objects, was but too visible; and that she had succeeded in inspiring him with something little short of hatred of his intended brother-in-law, was put beyond doubt by his own words. "*If* he only knew!" But even if he did know, was it likely that one so besotted would, through that knowledge, be loosed from the powerful spell that bound him? Was it not on the other hand certain, that the discovery of who had been his bolder and more successful predecessor, would kindle in him a fury calculated to lead to any excess of violence? It was fortunate for Katherine that she saw these things too plainly to fancy, for more than a moment, that her brother's cure could be effected by anything she might have to reveal. Since to speak was impossible, it was something to be spared the additional distraction of

mind which must have assailed her, had she believed it in her power to do aught but hope and pray that fresh evil might be averted from her and hers.

The ceremony of dinner necessarily brought about a truce, during which everybody behaved as if nobody had anything to complain of, and Mrs. Oakly took the opportunity of expressing her delight in the company of her sister and her two pretty nieces (who were expected back on Monday), and also her hope that her dear son would be gracious enough to return from Moreleigh Abbey before very long, in order that they might make his acquaintance, which, as she did not fail to add, "they were exceedingly desirous to do." The young Sultan listened benignly, and though (according to custom) he refused to bind himself to any particular day, was condescending enough to allow his mother to expect—to hope, rather—that he would bear her wish in mind. With his sister he did not, that evening, resume the discussion of any painful topic; but his private conversation with his mother was entirely calculated to produce in her an accession of doubt as to whether she ought, or ought not, to be pleased with Oswald Langton as a son-in-law. So annoyed, indeed, was she—so alarmed, even—by some of her son's remarks, that had she not that very morning agreed to the naming of the wedding-day, and in consequence thereof written and sent sundry invitations, as well as various letters to tradespeople, she would have been almost inclined to ask Katherine "if, after all, her happiness was so much engaged in this affair as that she might not yet think better of it?"

She did not make any such direct proposal, being restrained to the full as much by unwillingness to disturb existing arrangements, and the notion of "things having gone so far," as by her old fancy for Langton. Katherine however perceived plainly what was passing in her mother's mind, and nothing could be more favourable for Oswald (in hers) than her seeing that, without anything being known really to his disadvantage, an unjust feeling of ill-will was rising against him in her family.

"As far as they are aware," thought she, "he is blameless; all they have to object against him is that he is not rich, and that he will not, against his own view of what is fit and right, yield blindly to my Uncle and Aunt Herbert's wishes. But *I* will be true, let my mother be ever so changeable, and Fred ever so ungrateful! He has erred; yet others have erred more deeply still; and Isabella Carew shall not have the triumph of parting him from me—from me whom she hesitated not to receive in her house for her own degrading convenience, without a thought save of how I could best serve her crooked aims! No! if I bound myself anew to him yesterday for the sake of his love and his repentance, I feel doubly knit to him to-day, that I see plainer than ever what influence it is that raises him up an enemy in my brother, and why it is my mother wavers in that liking which helped so much to Oswald's becoming what he is to me!"

With these feelings strong in her mind, Katherine retired to rest that night; nor were they likely to be weakened next morning, by her

still increased perception of the successful pains taken by Fred to keep the subject of the visit to Moreleigh Abbey constantly in her mother's memory.

"I verily believe," cried she, unable to control her impatience when alone with Annie for awhile after breakfast, "I verily believe there will come messages and letters to us at the Lakes even, worrying about the Carews!"

"That's all thanks to your having been so wonderfully good—stupid *I* call it—as to have minded what mamma said in the winter about wishing you 'to spend your honeymoon in England!'" replied Annie (with whom it had been a theme of constant wonder that Katherine had not insisted on spending it abroad). "And if I were you," continued she in an earnest tone of advice, "I should pluck up courage and change my plans; more especially since *they* have grown so unreasonable."

Annie was not—could not, in fact—be aware that the easiness with which Katherine and Oswald had fallen into Mrs. Oakly's views, had been connected with a vague and secret fear, with which—each unknown to the other—both had been affected. This fear, which, so far as Katherine was concerned, had been but indistinctly acknowledged even to herself, consisted in the notion that abroad—although they knew not precisely when or where—there was always the chance of meeting Lady Carew; and though this chance had been put an end to by her return to England, both parties had equally felt too conscious to declare a change of mind thereupon. Now, however,

Katherine fancied she should be less haunted with a sense of insecurity, less beset with a dread of evil, if permitted to pass the first few weeks after her marriage there, where she could not, by any human possibility, come across one who was spending the summer in an English country seat, and she replied, though in a listless manner, which provoked Annie:

"Well, if I had to choose now, I daresay I should be for the Continent; but it is too late to alter plans, and I believe it would annoy mamma."

"Not a bit," rejoined her sister, "not a bit, if it were only sensibly managed; and my notion is . . ."

But what Annie's notions were, Katherine was never destined to learn, for at that moment Frederick entered the room with, in his hand, a letter directed to "Miss Desborough," which had, it seemed, by some odd chance, remained in the bottom of the letter bag, and had therefore not been given out with the rest. The epistle proved to be from Mrs. Spencer Langton, full of ecstatic rejoicing on "the day's being at last named," and begging to know, or rather giving her opinion as to what ought to be, the dress, not only of little Mildreda, but also of the other more juvenile of the bridesmaids who were to figure on the approaching occasion.

"Oh Annie, do settle whether they are to have blue or pink ribbons!" cried Katherine in a wearied tone.

"How stupid of you, Kate, not to care, when you know too that blue is so much the most becoming to Edith and Julia!"

"I can't care, somehow, Annie! but don't let there be a squabble about it, whatever happens."

"No, for Mrs. Spencer may deck Milly out in pink, if she pleases; only that needn't bind *us*, I should think," said Annie, who, having no notion of being "dictated to from the Moat," ran off to impress her own views of the fitness of things on Miss Freeman and her mother, while Frederick, who had been a silent listener to the speeches exchanged, drew nearer his eldest sister as the younger disappeared, and said, with a look of grave sympathy:

"You are out of spirits, Kate.",

She did not deny what she knew to be self-evident; but observed, "that it was scarcely possible, when on the point of entering on engagements that were to alter the whole course of existence, to retain light-heartedness enough to care for the sort of details which naturally occupied those whose interest was less personal."

"That's all very well," returned he, "but you wouldn't wear the face you have been wearing these two days, Kate, if you were looking forward with real, unalloyed pleasure to this marriage you have let yourself be persuaded into between poor dear old Cecy and Annie! The man's not good enough for you! It has been thought so all along by one who takes an interest in you which you don't believe in, and don't value as you should, and I would stand by you to support you, through thick and thin, if you made up your mind, even at the eleventh hour, to break it off!"

"Break it off, Fred!" repeated she, with almost

a scream of astonishment; "I suppose, I believe, you mean kindly by me; but you have completely mistaken my feelings! If I had wished it, I should and would have broken off an engagement I repented of, without anyone's help."

"I conclude I *am* mistaken," said he, in a displeased tone; "but so are other people, whom *you*, however, must have led into being so. I have had a note from Moreleigh Abbey this morning (*she* arrived there yesterday), mentioning allusively 'that you had appeared on Wednesday so disgusted with the tyranny already exercised over you, as to make it probable the gentleman would never be given the opportunity of carrying it out farther.' You are not going to tell me she invented that, are you?"

"It is true," replied his sister, "that she saw me, not only in great embarrassment, but in great grief; for it was a real and keen affliction to refuse her request; and—I can comprehend her taking up the impression you speak of—yet she is totally mistaken if she supposes I am going to break with Oswald on that score. He thinks what he has determined on right; I agreed from the first to yield to him, and I shall be obliged to you, Fred, if you will let Isabella know, as soon as you see her (though not as a message from me), that my engagement still holds, and is to be fulfilled on Thursday week next."

"As you please, Kate—as you please! I hope you may not live to regret your obstinacy!"

"I hope not, Fred!" answered she, earnestly.

"Then," said he, turning towards her again after

having made a step as if to leave the room, "then you love the man, Kate?"

"If I did not, why should I have promised to marry him in ten days?"

"Oh, there are so many reasons why girls marry! —he had the first word with you, and you might be bored with living here always. It's more than that, I see, though it's strange in my eyes too; but I suppose we all wonder at each other's loves! Langton's a devilish lucky dog, that I will say; and I should be glad if I could like him better on your account, for you are a good girl at bottom, Kate, only a great goose just now."

Having thus expressed himself, he left his sister to reflect, with more and more disturbance and indignation, on this additional proof of the revengeful spirit in which Lady Carew sought, with deliberate intent, to render her union with Langton impossible.

"In *that* she shall never, never succeed!" said she to herself. "Were I only as sure that, when she finds Fred useless as an instrument to serve her spite, she would thereupon cease to think him worth deluding any farther!"

It is to be supposed that Frederick thenceforth thought all argument with his sister wasted; for he did not attack her again on the subject. He took his departure for Moreleigh Abbey next morning, his mother beseeching him to be back as soon as he could to meet his aunt and cousins, who were to leave the Selwyns on Monday, and then turning round to say, after she had looked her last at him, "that he had such a feeling, dear fellow! of what he owed the Carews for their great hospitality at Florence!"

"I am sure, Kate," added she, "we all *do* owe her a great deal for that kindness of hers! Fred says himself that there was a sad gambling set among the young men he was thrown with; and he does not know how he could have kept out of it, but for Lady Carew's house being so constantly open to him morning and evening. I must say the knowledge of her being, as it were, Fred's salvation, does make me feel, more than ever, your not being free to acknowledge it in the way that would be most valued by her and all her relations."

"Dear mamma, it's impossible; the thing is altogether very unfortunate; but there is no use in thinking or speaking of it more."

The sight of tears gathering in Katherine's eyes did more to silence Mrs. Oakly than the fullest explanation; and she accordingly desisted at last from farther remarks in her presence, observing to her husband, in a lamentable tone, "that poor Kate's minding them so much was a proof of how much it cost her to seem resigned."

"To be sure," added she, with one of her deepest sighs, "all men are tyrants! but they don't (in general) begin to tyrannise before the power is quite in their hands."

Now it was undoubtedly true that the late Frederick Desborough had been tyrannical, and very tyrannical; but it seemed rather unfair to address such a wholesale accusation to his good-natured successor, who, however, had the wisdom to refrain from taking up the cudgels for his sex, though he did venture to say "that in his opinion, if Kate never had to suffer from worse tyranny

than being hindered visiting a very slippery sort of a lady, her lot would be very endurable."

"Endurable! I didn't say it wouldn't be *that*," replied his wife, "but it really is cruel to assume anything disadvantageous to poor Lady Carew, only because she has an elderly husband, and he approves of her seeing as much company as she likes—for indeed that's all."

"May be," returned her husband, "but though I have never made or meddled in the matter, and am not going to begin now, I do think Oswald Langton more likely to know what he is about in this business than Herbert Desborough and his wife, who have only my lady's own word for her prudence and propriety of conduct. If he has his doubts, he is right to act as he is doing, though it wouldn't suit him perhaps to give his precise reasons why; a man is not always free to do that, even when he has them; and I have observed Langton has always been very careful in what he has said about her."

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was a very natural thing that the Miss Selwyns and their mother should accompany the Murrays when they returned to Wyngate on Monday afternoon; and it was equally natural that their arrival should be a signal for the commencement of that amount of talking, laughing, and exchange of compliments and congratulations to be expected between near neighbours and relations, when two brides elect were of the party. Selina Selwyn's trousseau had been exhibited some time back, so it was now Katherine's turn to do the honors of the room, where everything a woman may or may not want for the space of ten years, was either hung up or laid out for inspection; and in this apartment the assembled young ladies examined and admired, and in the intervals of examining and admiring, poured forth the whole stock of their ideas—original and borrowed—on dress, love-matches, long engagements, and the different customs obtaining on these points on the opposite sides of the channel. The necessity of entering into the spirit of the rest, and of appearing as lively as she was expected to be, was of use to Katherine; and even when the Selwyns had seen all they wished to see, and Selina (who was to be married a few days after Katherine,

and was not to be present at *her* wedding) had bid her a sort of half sentimental farewell, still the impetus given did not entirely die away. The Genius of Bustle (invariably the presiding Deity in any household where a wedding is to take place within a fortnight) did not fail to establish itself at Wyngate; and when it appeared, by a letter received on the following day, that, owing to some arrangements of the Mr. Desboroughs, they could not possibly *both* bestow their gracious countenance on their niece's marriage, unless it were put off from the Thursday till the Saturday, and when Mrs. Oakly had immediately decided that put off it must be, the reign of Bustle—instead of being thereby any ways brought to a pause—became yet more absolute than before. How Oswald would take the news of this delay when he appeared next morning, Katherine had scarcely time to consider, so constantly occupied was she in writing the many explanatory notes which her mother declared herself "too nervous" to write, as also in receiving the visits of sundry neighbours whom Mrs. Oakly (after they were already in the drawing-room) declared herself "too nervous" to see. By vigorous exertions, however, and with some help from Louisa and Henrietta Murray, the chief portion of the "putting off" work was got over before night, and by breakfast time next morning all was accomplished. Mrs. Oakly, however, sighed repeatedly as she every now and then looked at a letter beside her, which she at last handed to her daughter, saying, with a peculiar expression of countenance:

"From Fred!—you may like to read what he says."

What he said was chiefly that his hostess—finding her residence in England rendered so unpleasant "through the malice of enemies, and the lukewarmness of friends"—had persuaded her husband (who had now nearly despatched the business that had brought him home) to take her back to the Continent, whither they meant to proceed in about three weeks. That the Carews should leave England so shortly, was no doubt felt by Katherine as a considerable relief; but even while sensible of this, and while acknowledging to herself that it was fortunate she had never gone farther than to *wish* the cottage at Ambleside could be exchanged for a Continental tour, there was a something, both in the tone of the letter and in her mother's look as she gave it to her, which wakened up a whole nest of serpents in her bosom.

"Kate," said Annie, when they were first alone together after breakfast, "you look like a ghost!"

"Do I?" was the answer. "I was very long getting to sleep last night."

"I daresay," replied Annie; "but you must really scratch your cheeks a little, or do something to get some color into them before Oswald comes, or he will think that the fixing of the day has disagreed with you."

Her speech effectually accomplished what was meant to result from the process she recommended, for her sister's cheeks glowed with so deep a crimson, as to be, in Annie's opinion, something beyond the exact rose-hue of beauty; nor did the flush subside while she sat considering "how soon Oswald might indeed appear." It might now be

so *very* soon, that when, in a minute or two, her young sister was called away, she yielded to the sort of restless impatience that seized on her, and hurrying upstairs, wandered into Annie's bedroom, whence she was always sure of having the first sight of him she awaited, supposing him to come, as he usually did, by the back way. By that way he now came; but she was so struck by the grave —the gloomy—aspect he wore as he walked slowly in, that dreading the possibility of some new evil, she threw open the window, from which she had meant only to peep unseen, and called out aloud:

"Oswald!—has anything happened?"

He looked up with so thorough a change of countenance as at once relieved her, even before he said, smiling:

"No, Kate—I *see* nothing has happened! When I get in, I'll tell you what I was in fear of."

She hurried downstairs to the hall, where she met him, and heard, as they turned together into the library, that, at the station, he had met young Slanning, who, after showing considerable surprise at finding that he (Langton) was bound for Wyngate, explained it by confessing to having heard, the day before, "that Miss Desborough's marriage was broken off!"

"He seemed annoyed at his blunder," proceeded Oswald, "muttered something about 'supposing he had misunderstood,' and I of course 'supposed so too;' but—though I believe I *ought* not to have heeded anything, when I had your promise to set against the talk of the whole world—still you know how 'conscience doth make cowards of us all,' and

I confess I came on here in as pleasant a state of confused dread as to what might be awaiting me, as ever man was visited with for his sins!"

"You had no cause!" said Katherine. "But," continued she, "I think I understand how the mistake originated. Mrs. Templeton was to dine at the Slannings' yesterday, and having been here in the afternoon, she had heard from me that the day is now *put off* (don't look so terrified again, Oswald!—it is only till the Saturday, on account of my uncles), and if she repeated that at the Slannings', it is not very wonderful if poor Dick translated 'put off' into 'break off.' It was just very unlucky he betrayed his mistake to you; though, to be sure, I should have thought the fright would have prevented you from being so vexed as I see you are at the 'put off;' for really, Oswald, I don't think mamma could have done otherwise than agree to such a trifling change of plans, to gratify my uncles!"

"It seems a trifle, I know; but—though I have indeed had too great a fright not to be thankful things are no worse—I can't forget that every minute brings its chances with it, and that if your uncles, or your mother, could catch hold of any handle against me, you would find it hard to keep faith, in spite of what would be so—so plausibly—urged. I don't complain; I believe—as you say—that your mother could not do otherwise; at any rate, *you* could not oppose her; but I live in such fear of losing all, that forty-eight hours seem an eternity to me. If it were not for *that* fear, I should have scrupled last Thursday to have got everything settled for such an early day."

"Well, Oswald," replied Katherine, with an endeavour at cheerfulness, "you must give over thinking so much of gloomy possibilities, and tell me something about Cecy, and how her wedding went off! I assure you there was so little in the note I had from you on Monday, that everybody was disappointed at my having no news for them."

"Why, there really was so very little to tell (beyond that it all went off well), that I thought it better to keep it till I came; and now . . ."

At this moment Annie opened the door, and telling Oswald "he was wanted," carried him off with her, leaving Katherine somewhat disappointed at being interrupted just as she had begun upon a subject of conversation so interesting to both, as to make it a natural change from their more directly personal topics, which, though they could never be forgotten, were perhaps better not recurred to.

Oswald was not away many minutes, but to Katherine they seemed much longer; and she was beginning to ask herself whether it would not be her duty to go and see if her aunt and cousins had yet released themselves and their maid from a dress consultation, for which they had retired to Mrs. Murray's room immediately after breakfast, when he at last appeared, saying:

"Don't go, Kate! nobody wants you in the drawing-room, or anywhere else—at least, nobody wants you as I do. Sit down here, and tell me exactly what you would like to do about our tour."

"I thought," returned she, as she placed herself beside him, "I thought it was all settled we should go to the Lakes!"

"So it was; but I have just been hearing

(confidentially) from Annie that your liking—your actual preference—would be to go abroad. Now, I want to do what you really, and in your heart, prefer. Where should you most wish to be taken to?"

"I should most wish to remain in England," replied she.

"Really and truly would you?"

"Yes."

"Then what can have made Annie so certain you had changed your mind?"

"I understand—I see—I *had* changed it at one time," said Katherine, blushing deeply.

"And now you have changed it again?" asked he, with a look of puzzled inquiry.

"I believe it is best to speak out the exact truth," answered she, though with some embarrassment. "I thought it pleasanter to go abroad, when I thought Lady Carew was settled in England; but I had rather our old plan of the Lakes should stand, now I hear she is to return to the Continent so very presently."

"How have you heard she is going?—did she tell you so?" asked Langton.

"No; but I learnt their plans from a letter of Fred's, that came to-day from Moreleigh Abbey."

"Is Fred staying at Moreleigh Abbey?"

"Yes—he went there on Saturday."

"For how long?"

"For an indefinite time, I believe."

"Did he come from Florence with them?"

"Not with them, but soon after."

"And was he much with them in Town?"

"I imagine he must have been."

"Then he'll go abroad again when they do, and she'll be the ruin of him!"

Something in the decided tone of this prophecy, coming as it did from Oswald Langton's lips, jarred strangely against Katherine, and she turned her head away as she said:

"I trust that may not be in her power."

"I would willingly hope not," returned he; "but—my being struck with the opposite chance has hurt you—I should have done better not to have brought it before you; for then I might have escaped giving you the feeling that—that some wrongs are apt to be passed on, and that the first offender may therefore be held guilty of the whole following chain of mischief."

This speech, prompted by a self-tormenting mind, described so exactly what had presented itself to her, when he first expressed his view of what was likely to be her brother's fate, that she had no power to deny the thought ascribed to her, and sat looking silently upon the ground, while tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. He rose abruptly; but after walking to the end of the room, turned back and drew near her, saying bitterly:

"I see it's as I guessed—see, too, that you are unhappy. If you are repenting, after all, Kate, do as you please—there's time; for I will never have you say or think I took advantage of the feeling of a moment, to move you to what went against you in your sober senses."

"I *am* very unhappy," replied she; "more un-

happy about Fred than you would easily believe; unhappy, too, from being unable to command my looks enough to prevent your exercising your imagination with such painful guesses; but I don't think I should be happier for saying farewell to you—at least, if you can be content with the melancholy kind of creature I am become."

"That is the sharpest reproach I have had made me yet!" cried he.

"Oh, indeed I did not mean it; and I will try—shall in time grow—to be less constantly beset by the thought of all this combination of Fred and his prospects, with everything else it most grieves me to think of! I can't help being afflicted; but if you will only believe me, a reproach to you was the farthest thing from my intention."

"You are the kindest of kind beings," said he, repenting his irritability, "and I deserved to be taken at my word! The truth is, Kate, that it requires a great deal of temper to stand the knowledge that I, who had meant and hoped to make you the happiest of women, have, through my own actions, and those of others which may at least seem traceable to mine, rendered you miserable. I abhor myself, and can't always believe, as faithfully as I ought, that any creature is so thoroughly generous as I see and feel that you are. Can you forgive me? Can you bear with me?"

"We must bear with each other, Oswald! and I'm sure I forgive you!—only don't fancy reproofs, when I would do anything I could in the world to free you from the notion that I feel reproachfully towards you! But promise me one thing—when

Fred comes back—if he does come back from Moreleigh Abbey while you are here—let him say and do whatever is most silly and provoking, don't let yourself be provoked, dear Oswald, if you love me!"

CHAPTER IX.

The betrothed pair did not again allow themselves to approach so near the verge of strife; for each looked back on what had for a moment threatened to be the result of the words they had exchanged, with a terror which put them on their guard; but their intercourse was not—could not be—what it had been. For though Langton loved Katherine if possible more passionately than ever, this increased fervour only rendered him more painfully watchful of her manner towards him, more liable to suspect and imagine tokens of dissatisfaction in her; while she, on her part, was too fearful of either over-acting an appearance of cheerfulness, or of letting him see more clearly than he did already the weight that hung on her spirits, to regain anything like serenity. Her duty to her guests was no doubt conducive to her keeping up outward equanimity; for, though the struggle to do so was both a hard and a wearing one, the constant presence of her cousins was an effectual bar to her being left too much either to her own or to Langton's exclusive society. The company of the Murrays was also advantageous in another way; as, besides the fact that both mother and daughters were so much pleased with their future relation as to form

a powerful make-weight with Mrs. Oakly against Fred's "disapproval," the liveliness of two pretty nieces of seventeen and eighteen, and the frequent renewal of confidential talks with her sister, prevented her, by diverting her mind and raising her spirits, from bestowing any embarrassing amount of observation on her own daughter. From embarrassing observations on her cousins' part also, Katherine was wonderfully free; for though disposed to be interested in all her concerns, the distance of their home in Scotland had been such a hindrance to previous intimacy, that there was little or no risk of their noticing trifles, that would infallibly have struck Cecilia with surprise.

On the second day after Langton's return from Shadworth, Mrs. Oakly's anxiety for "dear Fred's appearance, to make acquaintance with his aunt and cousins," was relieved by his unexpected arrival from Moreleigh Abbey; an event by no means due to her humble entreaties, but simply to the fact that Sir Edward and Lady Carew were leaving home to spend a few days with a nephew, into whose house the lady's "servant," however devoted, could not well be introduced. He betook himself, in consequence, to Wyngate, with the intention of there getting rid, as he best might, of the time during which he was to be—"anyhow"—deprived of the sight of her out of whose presence he hardly thought existence endurable.

To Katherine, the news of Fred's arrival—communicated to her with joyful eagerness by Edith and Julia while she was dressing—could not, with her late experience, be precisely pleasurable; but she rejoiced in the defence which a numerous

party was likely to afford against argumentative or contradictory talk between him and Oswald, and she considered, too, that whatever might be his inclination, Fred's attention must—in some degree—be taken up with his cousins, who happened to be girls possessed of just that amount of liveliness and security to please, which—without actual forwardness—is generally sure to have its claims acknowledged. What he thought of them at first sight, she could not exactly discover; but late in the evening, when Langton had left her to join Mr. Oakly, who, with his wife and sister-in-law, was listening in the back drawing-room to a duet sung by the two Murrays, Fred took possession of the vacant seat, observing to his sister that he had no doubt Lousia and Henrietta were very nice girls—sang very fairly too—but it was rather a bore to have to seem interested with their talk, and a great rest to sit down in peace while they were at the piano.

"What I so particularly hate," proceeded he, "is to be cross-questioned about the ways and habits of my own private friends, as if they were newly imported animals, as Louisa was doing all dinner time about Lady Carew, and her dress and her jewels, and their place, and everything! And my mother too, nearly as bad! when one would have thought she might have known how it must annoy me—before Langton, who, though he said not a word, was looking supercilious with all his might, while the splendors of Moreleigh Abbey were being inquired into."

The close of the duet here obliged Fred to make a pause in his critical remarks; but when the Miss

Murrays had been duly complimented upon their performance, and when they complied with the general request for "just such another" (in which Fred, though from a distance, joined), he began again with—

"Will you enlighten me, Kate, as to who was the object of your intended's 'grande passion' last year in Paris?"

"Indeed, Fred," replied his sister, as soon as she could collect her ideas after so strange and unexpected a question, "*I* am not likely to be able to inform you! you know," continued she, making a desperate effort to appear calm, "you know that people don't in general talk of the 'old love' to the new."

"No, I suppose not; but I should have thought you must have heard somehow; I couldn't get Lady Carew to give names; but once when I asked her *why* she was so sure he did not love you as you ought to be loved, she said 'she could not conceive such an instantaneous transfer of a heart which had, till that moment, been so entirely devoted to another.' But who that other was, whether a 'comtesse' or a 'marquise,' or an English woman or girl, she never would tell me; and I just thought you might not be quite so discreet."

"Well, you see, I can give you no information on the subject, either."

"Oh! I shouldn't have asked you," rejoined he, "if I hadn't supposed that, as nothing the least like love-making between him and you passed in Paris, you might have heard something of his previous history there; so don't be affronted, Kate."

"I am not affronted; for I am too well convinced of Oswald's attachment now—whatever may have been his 'previous history'—to be disturbed by any such considerations; but it would have been kinder, Fred, to keep to yourself such notions as Isabella has thought fit to communicate to you."

"She was only led into expressing them, I assure you, from her very high view of your claims, and of what you might have commanded—if—but I suppose I ought to have followed her example in discretion, and I'm sorry I didn't."

The last duet was now concluded, and Frederick, rising from his seat, walked up to the piano, where he expressed his admiration both of his cousins' voices and of the pieces they had chosen, in a manner calculated to persuade them, and indeed everyone (except Katherine), that he had listened, in a "trance of delight," to each note. His sister watched the easy grace with which he went through these acts of "social hypocrisy," the perfection of which is rarely attained at such an early age; and her reflections were divided between the consideration of "how fascinating Fred *could* be when he choose," and the puzzle as to what might have been Lady Carew's motive for the great imprudence of which she had been guilty. That she had made this half confidence to Fred, in the expectation of his repeating it to her, she felt positive. "Is it possible," thought she, "that Isabella can have taken such a risk for the sole end and aim of giving Fred the means of tormenting me? Or is it that she believes me to have been—not persuaded—but *deceived* into forgiveness? I

remember she said 'he would deny all!' She cannot enter into—cannot conceive—the honor and uprightness of Oswald's real nature, and she thinks by this side blow to unmask him! She does not know that, as there is nothing to unmask, her pains are wasted. What has passed, chiefly hurts me as showing what a complete puppet my brother is in her hands!"

Next day, as Katherine, her cousins, Annie, Fred, and Langton were returning in a body from Mrs. Tynedale's, whither they had gone on an "embassy," to invite the old lady to dine at Wyngate House on the following Thursday, to meet Mr. Langton and Alexander, many joking comparisons were instituted between the large amount of detail, description, "interesting particulars" of every sort, furnished by their elderly friend on the subject of Cecilia's wedding, and the meagre account supplied by the bride's brother, who, as the girls complained in chorus, had been back from Shadworth nearly three days, yet had never been able to exert his memory enough to record the nature of his sister's "going off" dress. From the "going off" dress it was an easy transition to the Lewis Markhams' tour abroad, and its direction; the mention of which recalled so keenly to Annie's mind the advice she had frequently given in vain to the pair now present, and the signal failure of her last attempt to get her views attended to, that she could not refrain from exclaiming at the unenterprizing kind of excursion contemplated by them.

"Fancy," said she, with an appealing look to the Murrays, "fancy their just going to a cottage

by an English Lake, when they might go anywhere they pleased! They deserve to get heartily tired of it, and I daresay they will before a fortnight is out."

"And fancy, Louisa," said Fred, addressing that very cousin by whom he had professed himself so much annoyed the preceding evening, "fancy their not choosing to go, as they might, after the Lakes, to that very place you are so interested about, Moreleigh Abbey! Think of their refusing a most pressing invitation there, and all for no reason whatever, that I can make out, at least!"

"Is that true, Kate?"

"Can that be, Mr. Langton?" cried both the young ladies at once.

A confession of the charge was thereby elicited from the parties concerned, who managed however, partly by playful, partly by matter-of-fact replies, so far to appease the young girls' curiosity as to prevent its leading them to any close examination into the grounds of a refusal so amazing to them. The subject was pretty well talked out by the time they reached the house, which the ladies immediately entered, Katherine and one of the Murrays to dress for riding, the other sister and Annie to prepare for driving with Mrs. Oakly and Mrs. Murray. The two men stood lingering before the door, waiting for both ladies and horses to appear, when Fred Desborough, turning suddenly towards Oswald, said sharply:

"What *is* the reason, Langton, why you won't take Kate to the Carews'?"

"I have been telling your cousins some half

dozen reasons; you don't want to hear them over again?"

"Those reasons! no. I am not quite young lady enough to be put off with such chaff! What I *do* want to know is your *real* motive—which ought to be a strong one—to excuse your forcing Kate into conduct which, to an old friend, bears an appearance of indifference that amounts to heartlessness."

"I am afraid I have no better reason to give you," answered Langton quietly. "Your mother and Kate are satisfied, and therefore . . ."

"My mother is not satisfied!" interrupted Desborough. "She has been vexed, past expression, at the part Kate has been made to play, and if you were not aware of that already, you are now."

"You are very vehement about this, Fred, and I am sorry if it has annoyed Mrs. Oakly, though she has never expressed herself to me as if it weighed so much with her. As to Kate, I have not had to overcome any strong feeling in her on the subject, and I think she will tell you, as she has told me, that she is best pleased things should remain as they are."

"Kate, indeed!" cried her brother, with a scornful smile; "I believe you! She is your humble slave, and if you think black is white, conceives herself bound to be of the same opinion. Whether it is kind—whether it is honorable—to take such advantage of a girl's utter blindness as to lead her to do things she can hardly fail to be sorry for by-and-by, may, I think, bear a question."

Langton looked at him with some astonishment,

but said, without departing from his usual composure:

"You are taking up very warmly what I should hardly have supposed could have affected *you* particularly, in any point of view."

"It does affect me—affects me nearly—that my sister should shew coldness and ingratitude to one who has shown such affection and kindness to her, and—for her sake—to me! I can't bear she should exhibit herself in such a light! can't bear to feel myself so complete a cipher with her, that I am unable to move her to what I feel bound in friendship and gratitude, on my own score, to urge her doing! She knows of what importance her compliance is, and you know it too! So you see why it's no use expecting me to swallow the sort of reasons that do well enough for those girls, and that you thought might do for my mother! No, no; all that about engagements, and home visits, won't go down with me, and I return to my original question, what is your real reason for not choosing to take Kate to Moreleigh Abbey?"

Langton's color rose, but he commanded himself—perhaps the more easily from suspecting that Desborough *wished* for a quarrel with him—and replied, in a calm voice, "that he could make great allowance for one so young and so enthusiastic, but was not used to have the reasons he gave for his actions so much cavilled at, especially by persons not themselves directly interested in what he thought fit to do."

"I have told you how I am interested! and I don't want allowance to be made for me!" exclaimed Fred, impetuously; "so if you shirk

telling me the real motives of your conduct, I can but conclude that they are opinions which you think it *prudent* to keep to yourself when in company with any true friend of Lady Carew's!"

Langton's eyes flashed, but he again reined in the angry reply that rose to his lip, and said:

"I can take a great deal from Kate's brother, Fred, and shall therefore be willing to forget that you have expressed yourself so hastily; but I would advise you, if not for your own, for Lady Carew's sake, not—with any other man—to assume so thoughtlessly what you would least wish to be his opinion of her."

"Then you won't confess?" urged Fred.

"No—I am not in the habit of confessing," replied Oswald, with a slight smile.

"Then if you won't avow what would alone furnish you with a just excuse, you can't be surprised at what I think of your doings! I have spoken out because I couldn't help myself; if you are offended, I can't help it, either; I give you free leave!"

"I am not going to be offended, Fred," said Langton, with perfect coolness. "I am sorry that my plans cause you annoyance; but, as you said just now, 'I can't help myself,' and do not mean to change them."

As he spoke, Henrietta Murray was seen coming downstairs, and into the hall, followed by Katherine, who called out to Fred, asking if the horses were come round, and begging him to hurry the grooms a little if they were not. He obeyed, somewhat sulkily, muttering as he went, in a tone sufficiently audible to Langton, "that he supposed he ought to look on

him as very magnanimous, but somehow he could not feel grateful for that sort of indulgence." He did, however, get the horses brought round within a few moments, and mounted his cousin, while Langton performed the same office for Katherine; but he was scarcely in the saddle himself, before he found out that there was something or other he *must* do at the Wyngate Post Town, which lay diametrically opposite to the point towards which the others had settled to proceed (in order to show a particular view to Henrietta Murray), and he rode off in utter inability to recover himself sufficiently for making the effort of entertaining his cousin during an hour or two. He was perhaps helped to his lack of courtesy by the consideration that his absence, by obliging Langton to attend to both ladies, would deprive him of the virtually tête-à-tête ride with Katherine, which he had doubtless expected when the party was to consist of four.

At dinner-time Fred Desborough had just so far returned to his senses, that he was able to behave with decent civility to his assembled relations; but he had by no means smoothed his temper in the degree to enable him to take part, with anything like liveliness and spirit, in the talk going on around him; and he said little to anybody, absolutely nothing to Oswald Langton. Everyone could see he was out of humour, which indeed his conduct in riding by himself had rendered obvious; but as Langton had not thought it necessary to let Katherine know of what had passed while she and her cousin were putting on their habits, she had no idea how nearly upon the verge of a quarrel he

and her brother had stood. In the evening there was an exhibition, for the benefit of the Miss Murrays, of all the various presents, both of jewellery and other articles, lately made to Miss Desborough, which received their due meed of admiration from the young girls, who, besides being disposed to think everything beautiful, might on this occasion be justly delighted by the good taste which had presided at the choice of almost all the costly trifles now displayed before them. But in addition to the other trinkets which Katherine had already seen, there were now two or three ornaments which had only come down from London late that afternoon, concerning which her Uncle Peter Desborough had written, begging her to select from among them the one she liked best.

"They are all so lovely, I feel quite puzzled; you must really help me to choose!" cried she, addressing the female circle immediately around her; and Annie Oakly and Louisa Murray exclaimed, in the same breath, that there could not possibly be a doubt as to the decisive claims of a brooch, which, in graceful peculiarity of workmanship as well as in richness of materials, did indeed far surpass what had been sent along with it.

"I never saw anything the least like it," said Mrs. Murray; "it is the most uncommon looking, as well as the prettiest thing of the sort I ever beheld!"

Katherine fancied she *had* seen somewhere a brooch resembling it, but could not at the moment recollect when or where; at all events she agreed with the others in thinking it far the prettiest, and she told her step-father and Fred, as they came

into the drawing-room, "that her choice was made." She held up the ornament as she spoke; and her brother, the moment he saw it, gave it as his opinion that "if she had searched the world round, she could not have lighted on anything more exquisite —he *had* seen its match," he said, "worn by one whose taste stamped whatever she chose as the most perfect of its kind, and Kate could not do better than take pattern by her." His words brought back a confused recollection to his sister's mind of *where* she had seen the brooch's likeness, which must, she now thought, have been in Lady Carew's jewel case. She had never seen it on her, of that she was positive; but then Lady Carew had been in mourning during the whole time of her Paris visit, which would account for her not *wearing* anything of the kind. She was the more convinced that her present guess was right, because she was sure that to the "taste" of no other woman under the sun would Fred have alluded in such terms, and a feeling of irritation against herself came over her, for not having, from the first, recognised the brooch for what she now feared it must be—namely—a fac-simile of one of her quondam friend's most striking ornaments.

"I am not sure," she now began, looking doubtfully from the 'favourite' (as it might be called) to the other less admired pieces of jewellery, "I am not sure if I would not rather . . . ."

"You don't mean," interrupted Mr. Oakly, "that you can feel the least uncertainty! There's no comparison! The others are handsome, of course; your uncle wouldn't send what were not so; but they are completely thrown into the shade

by this one; it is something quite unique in its way!"

"Well, I suppose I had better take it," returned she, standing in a musing attitude with the brooch in her hand; "it certainly is much the prettiest."

"You suppose!" cried Annie; "of course you will; what was it sent here for but for you to take the greatest beauty?"

"Which it most undoubtedly is," observed Fred Desborough, as he walked away from the circle still formed by his aunt, his cousins, and sisters, round the bridal presents, to establish himself near his mother's sofa at the other end of the room.

"Come, Kate, you have settled now, I am sure," said Mrs. Murray; "so you may as well lay it at once on the table with the other presents, and put the three, that serve as foils to it, up again in their cases."

"Yes, aunt," answered she mechanically, but without doing as she was desired, while her Cousin Louisa observed, in a half whisper, "that Mr. Langton had not yet seen it."

"But Mr. Langton can't fail of preferring it, as we all do," replied her mother aloud.

"And here he is," cried Annie, as Oswald, who had remained in the dining-room to write a note, entered the room, quite ignorant of the cause of the eagerness with which he was greeted.

Henrietta, Louisa, and Annie rushed up to him, asking all at once, and pointing, as they spoke, to the brooch which Mrs. Murray had by this time fastened on Katherine's dress, "if he did not think *that* the prettiest thing he had ever seen?"

"Who sent you that, Kate?" asked he quickly, the moment he cast his eyes on it.

"My Uncle Peter," replied she; "with two or three more for me to choose from."

"Let us see the others then; I don't particularly fancy that."

"Not fancy that!" screamed Annie; "why, where can your eyes be, Oswald?"

"In my head, I believe," was his answer; "and, to my mind," added he, taking up one of the rejected ornaments, "either of these is preferable to the one Kate has on."

"You don't mean to say you think *them* prettier?" cried Annie, with the utmost disdain.

"We have all our different tastes," he replied, calmly.

"How it is possible that anyone should not be struck at once by the superiority of this, does surprise me," observed Mrs. Murray, who proceeded to notice its remarkable becomingness.

"You won't tell us you think it ugly!" urged one of her daughters.

"No; far from it; but for all its beauty, may I not prefer another?"

"Of course you may, but . . ."

"But I don't show good taste by my preference?—perhaps not; well, I can't help it; the thing *is* so, and if I have bad taste, I am sorry."

"The difficulty is," said Fred to his mother, while watching the party from afar, "the difficulty is to believe that any man alive, with the use of his senses, and the most common power of discrimination, should be of the opinion Langton *professes*."

"But, my dear, why should he profess it, if it is not his real one?" asked Mrs. Oakly.

Fred's answer was a shrug of the shoulders, and a glance which said unutterable things, as he looked again towards the group of girls still employed in arguing with Langton at the top of their voices.

"I resign myself to being convicted of flagrant bad taste," persisted he, "but I don't like what Kate has on, and I do like this other one. It is the unfortunate truth, however disgraceful to my judgment."

"Disgraceful to his judgment! what mock humility!" muttered Fred. "No one knows better the difference between one horse and another, or between one woman and another, for the matter of that! And he knows right well, you may depend on it, what's what in these things too! It's sheer perverseness and love of showing his power over Kate!"

"He won't hinder Kate's doing as she likes, Fred," said his mother; "he let her take the one *he* did not like of the two time-pieces your Aunt Murray gave her the choice of; and, though he preferred the turquoise bracelet I had down for her to the one with the amethyst clasp, you know he insisted on her pleasing herself, and she has done so. Of course she will do the same about this brooch, which I certainly wonder at anyone's not admiring; but, as he says, tastes are so very different."

"They are, indeed," returned her son, now rising and advancing towards the table on which his sister had just laid down the subject of

discussion. He took it up, and said, while examining it admiringly:

"The only objection I can imagine to this most beautiful ornament, is its resemblance to one of Lady Carew's."

"Why, what objection would that be?" said Annie, pertly; "*she's* not to be at the wedding, is she? And if she were, Kate wouldn't have it on!"

"*I* don't see it as an objection," rejoined Fred with marked emphasis.

"It would be just the contrary, if she is a person of such wonderfully good taste," observed one of his cousins.

"Its actual beauty can be neither increased nor lessened from that circumstance," said Oswald Langton to Miss Murray.

"And Kate will choose it and wear it, whether you like it or no, Oswald!" cried Annie.

"I daresay," replied he, in a careless tone, but with a look of annoyance, which, momentary as it was, did not escape Fred Desborough's observation.

"Come," said Mr. Oakly, "we have had enough of all this for the present; there is no need to decide now; to-morrow is Sunday, and we may as well leave the settling of this knotty point till Monday after breakfast."

To this all agreed, though Annie bid Langton "be sure to recollect that Kate had herself from the beginning preferred the brooch *he* had not the taste to admire;" and the little crowd dispersed in the direction of the tea and work-tables, with the exception of Fred, who lingered over the jewellery, and said to Oswald, who was following the ladies:

"You of course remember the fellow to this on Lady Carew?"

An indescribable cloud of vexation and embarrassment passed over Langton's face for the second time, as he replied:

"I believe—yes—I certainly have seen it on her."

Having so said he walked away, and Fred was left absolutely to himself. He had up to that instant believed Langton actuated as regarded Lady Carew by an illiberal prejudice, and by what he denominated "priggery;" the force of which he thought might extend to making him dislike, for his bride elect, even the ornaments worn by so objectionable a person. But the momentary hesitation at the beginning of his last answer, joined to the forced air of indifference with which he had added, "yes—I certainly have," roused a very different idea in his imagination, and one which was no sooner conceived, than it doubled the already strong dislike which he nourished for his intended brother-in-law. Was Oswald Langton one of those men whose "baffled presumption" had, according to Lady Carew, incited them to make common cause with the "envious women" by whom she considered herself persecuted? She had spoken of him always with a bitterness which might well be the result of some feeling of injury; but then, on the other hand, if he had been guilty of any insolence towards her, it was singular—considering the extremely confidential nature of her discourses—that she should never have adverted to such conduct on his part, even when apparently most inclined to say everything she knew to his disadvantage. The

shudder of a vague jealousy came over the youth, as he stood alone by the table, playing with the likeness of that ornament which he had been more than once permitted to fasten on the light folds of crape or muslin that veiled the bosom of her he loved. Had another ever been so highly favored? No, it was impossible! for by what slow degrees, after how much respectful observance, had he himself won the honor—the delight—of performing such a service! And to dream that he had had a predecessor in that Oswald Langton whom she detested, was as insane as it was hateful. Yet his fingers trembled to that degree that he wellnigh dropped the brooch which had given rise to such an odious vision; and he made haste to replace it in its red leather case, cursing it, while he did so, for a suggestor of misery, for an instrument of the fiend sent thither to torture and madden him. But his next internal ejaculation, as he looked at Langton, now seated between Katherine and one of her cousins, was simply, "What a fool I have been—even for one second—to fancy her taken by such a cold, uninteresting countenance! It was a nonsensical thought, putting all else out of the question. He just hates her out of prejudice, and she—with rather more cause—returns the compliment." And with this conclusion he satisfied himself that evening.

CHAPTER X.

IT was made known at breakfast next morning, that Fred had ordered his horse early to ride over to the Moat, with the intention, his mother said, "of being there in time to go to church with the Spencer Langtons, and of spending most of the day in their company." This sudden resolution was owing, partly to restlessness and the dislike of seeing Kate and Oswald together all day, and partly to a notion (hardly avowed to himself) that he might possibly, by making Mrs. Spencer Langton talk of her brother-in-law, learn something from whence to deduce a refutation of all grounds for that fear which had shot through his brain the night before. To make the lady talk was not difficult; and, as her husband called at the Lancefields' between the services, leaving her to entertain their guest, she was easily led, through the mention of Kate and her wedding, to talk a good deal of Oswald; of her past dislike —of her present liking—for him; of his original proposal there at the Moat, etc., etc. Out of all this her visitor could gain none of the sort of evidence he was seeking, unless it were in the negative shape of showing that Langton had seldom, or never, in his intercourse with his sister-

in-law, mentioned Lady Carew at all. There was nothing in Fred Desborough's manner to give his hostess a notion of his having any curiosity on the subject; and once embarked on the sea of gossip, she ran on from one thing to another, till she had got back to the wedding and the wedding presents, "à propos" of which she begged Fred (who had informed her of the pending discussion about the brooch) to "keep Kate up to the mark, and make her show proper spirit in choosing what she liked best, irrespectively of Oswald's bad taste." He was back at Wyngate just in time for dinner, and having ridden and talked off his sulkiness of the day before, behaved more attentively to his cousins, and with more regard to general courtesy, than he had yet done since his cross-examination of Langton concerning his reasons for declining the visit to Moreleigh Abbey. This happy mood lasted through most of the evening; he did duty with his aunt, found that he could get on with the two girls at the expense of very little trouble, and would have had his reward by going to bed in the conviction that his fidget of the preceeding night had been, indeed, nothing but a fidget, had he not, in lounging about the rooms after it had grown very dusk, but before the lamps were lighted, happened to stand still for a few moments near the deep embrasure of a window, from within which he heard his sister's voice and Langton's. Having no particular curiosity (as he had just observed to Louisa Murray) "to learn the 'art of love' from that pair," he would have moved off; but before doing so, his ear was struck by a very

earnest expression of thanks, on Oswald's part, for something to which Kate had apparently consented, and in her answer the word "brooch" was clearly uttered. This sound wakened within him such an irresistible desire to learn the nature of their communing, that, remaining where he was, he distinguished, when Langton next spoke, the disjointed sentences—"unconquerable feeling"—"couldn't bear to see it on you"—wound up by a repetition of thanks for "yielding what she preferred."

Having overheard so much, Fred Desborough walked off in time not to be noticed; but though he joined the circle now forming round the table and the newly lighted lamp, he scarcely spoke another word that night. "Why should Langton so abhor the ornament everyone else admired? And if his abhorrence sprang from pure caprice, or from sheer dislike of the woman on whom he had seen its fac-simile, why make it a point of secret favor with Kate, that she should reject what she liked, to take what she had no fancy for?" Fred knew that what his mother had said about Oswald's not habitually insisting on his own taste being consulted was correct, and this fact only made the present occurrences the more remarkable in his eyes. He had not—it is true—been able to follow the whole conversation; yet what had reached him showed, by tone and manner, the great importance attached to Kate's granting the favor desired. That this "favor" concerned the much-talked-of brooch he could not—albeit the word had been mentioned—have precisely taken his oath; but he was himself convinced of it, and, at all

events, the next morning would prove or disprove his inward verdict. On the following day, accordingly, towards the end of the breakfast, Henrietta Murray said gaily:

"I hope the grand affair is going to be settled now as it ought!"

"What grand affair, my dear?" asked Mrs. Oakly.

"The affair of the brooch, aunt, which was left unsettled on Saturday, and which we are all to assemble in the drawing-room to decide, in a minute or two."

"There will not be any occasion, Henrietta," said Katherine, blushing, and with a somewhat unsteady voice, "for I have been looking again at the different brooches, and I have decided, not on the general favourite, but on that with the amethyst centre; it will go so much better with the other ornaments I have, particularly the bracelet mamma gave me."

A murmur, nay, almost a groan of disappointment rose round the table. "Kate, you can' tbe in earnest!" "Kate, you are not so mean-spirited?" were the ejaculations of the two Murrays, while their mother observed, "that one great merit of *her* favourite was its being of a nature to suit with everything."

Kate however stuck to her decision in favor of the very handsome, but less gracefully peculiar, brooch with the amethyst centre; and when her brother asked her, rather contemptuously, if she were wise in always pretending to be pleased with what Langton "ordered her to like," she answered quietly, "that there was no pretence in the matter;

she had changed her mind, and no longer wished for that ornament which she confessed to having at first preferred."

Fred asked Langton, with a sort of sneer, "if this were sheer sympathy, or the result of magnetic influence skilfully exerted?" and Oswald's color rose slightly as he replied, "that of course he was not sorry Kate had lost her fancy for a thing he had no admiration for himself; but she was a free agent all the same, and he supposed she had, on the whole, pleased herself."

"Free agent!" muttered Desborough scornfully, but he dared not speak out his full reasons for not believing his sister to be such, as that must have entailed a confession of his listening to the half-whispered talk of the previous night.

Langton took no notice of the exclamation, which indeed was uttered in a tone he was not obliged to hear; and he jokingly parried the young ladies', and Mr. Oakly's attacks on his "forcing poor Kate to feign the same bad taste he was himself afflicted with."

By degrees the buzz of discontent and wondering died away; the company rose from table, and dispersed in various directions; and Fred Desborough, having nothing better to do, hung about the drawing-room, mainly to observe whether the singularity of Katherine's sudden change of mind, and of Langton's capricious antipathy, struck others as much as himself. To a certain extent, he perceived that it was so; for no sooner was she out of hearing, than his mother, aunt, and cousins all agreed "that Langton's freak, and her blind compliance with such a whim, were equally in-

comprehensible; and that *he* had shown himself at least as disagreeable as fanciful in the business."

Fred put so much control over himself as to make his own observations in a tone which—for him—was temperate; but although his mother entirely concurred in the opinion he put forward (partly as a touchstone), "that Langton's prejudice against Lady Carew was probably at the bottom of his dislike to the fac-simile of an ornament of hers," her doing so by no means confirmed him in what had been his first and more simple view of the matter. His imagination was now haunted by something widely different—something far more irritating—which hovered before his mental vision, though he could not, had he wished to do so, have precisely defined either the suspicion itself, or the combinations which had awakened it. Whatever it were, and however grounded, he could not now shake it off; and wherever he moved, with whomsoever he talked that forenoon, he was still inwardly inquiring of himself "whether it were possible that a mere prejudice, let it be as strong as it would, could have rendered any man of Langton's sense so pertinacious about such a very trifle? Or whether, on the contrary, this pertinacity, so unusual in him, did not denote—did not prove, rather—that there must be something most intensely disagreeable in the associations which impelled him to run counter to the taste and liking of a whole family he was visibly desirous to please, solely for the sake of preventing Katherine's wearing what might remind him of Lady Carew!" He strolled out while making these reflections, and, sauntering on and on amid the mild fragrance

of a beautiful day in June, he did not turn till he had nearly reached the park paling, from whence he was just beginning to retrace his steps when he came across his sister, his cousins, and Langton, who had unconsciously trodden the same path as he had, and whom he now joined as they went on towards the same spot he had made his turning point. They had scarcely gone so far, when Annie, without her bonnet, rushed towards them from the direction of the house, flying up to Oswald, and panting for breath, but holding out to him a small pocket-book, "which," she said (as soon as she could speak), "she had been hunting for him everywhere to put into his own hands."

"It ought to have been here on Saturday," continued she, "only those people at Willis's never keep their promises! But I keep mine, Oswald! and for all I consider you have behaved infamously about that love of a brooch (if I were Kate I would soon bring you to reason!), still, I recollect that when you were last here—staying—we settled to exchange pocket-books as soon as I could get one that was fit for anybody to take on a wedding tour! Here is mine, give me yours!"

Langton received the present with the thanks and compliments due to its giver, who replied bluntly:

"Well, I am glad you like it; I *do* think it's pretty compared to the old thing, at least; but I'm to have *that* for a remembrance, you know."

Langton said something about its unworthiness to be presented to her, but as she persisted that it would be "useful if not ornamental," he pulled the article for exchange out of his pocket, but had

no sooner cast his eye on it than, instead of placing it in Annie's outstretched hand, he drew back, said it was a wrong one, "not *that* he had promised to give her," and, regardless of her assurances "that it would do all the same, whatever it was," he lifted it on high without letting her touch it, and flung it so far over the park paling as to lodge it in the ditch beyond.

"It's in its right place now!" cried he; "but if you really care, Annie, to have the one I was to have given you in exchange, I will write to old Mary, at Shadworth, and tell her to rout it out and give it to my father, when he and Alexander come here on Thursday."

"Yes, do," said Annie, "for I always like to have engagements kept. But what must that one you threw away have been, for you to be ashamed to show it, considering how nice and shabby the other is that you thought quite decent?"

"You see there are gradations in shabbiness, Annie," observed one of her cousins, "and even Mr. Langton can be sensible of the disgracefulness of a *very* decrepid pocket-book. Not that his appeared to me so, from the glimpse I had of it before it was thrown away."

Both Annie and the rest of the party seemed perfectly satisfied, and the conversation soon turned to very different subjects from pocket-books, old or new; but there was one person who had noted what passed with a more keeenly observant eye, and who was by no means so indifferent as his young sister, as to what that "rubbish" might be, which had been flung into the ditch. Fred Desborough had remarked, not only the look of vexed

surprise with which Langton had pronounced the pocket-book he took out "a wrong one;" but thought he had perceived on his countenance an expression of fear—of actual dread—lest Annie should get hold of what was in his hand, and then a momentary glance of angry bitterness, as he threw from him the trifle, the sight of which seemed to cause him so much disturbance. Was all this but a delusion of his own awakened imagination? He longed for proof that it was nothing more; and such proof it occurred to him that he might have obtained, had he been free to examine the little pocket-book, and certify himself of its utter insignificance. This idea had no sooner presented itself to him, than he found a pretext for "taking a short cut," as he called it, towards the house; and once out of sight of the party he had quitted, he took, with swift steps, a "long round," which brought him, at last, to that part of the park where Annie had appeared with her present. He swung himself lightly over the paling, gazed with little real hope into the muddy stream which stagnated in the ditch below, and saw nothing within it; but casting a glance towards the other side he beheld, just out of the water on the opposite bank, what appeared to him more like a French lady's "agenda," than a man's pocket-book. He leapt over and picked it up; it was the very match, in binding and size, to one he had seen several times in Lady Carew's work-basket! His whole frame quivered as he touched it, and he sat down on the trunk of a felled tree to look over its contents, though there was no reason to suppose that its inside would supply him with any more precise information than

its exterior. It was furnished within, as such articles usually are; was visibly of French workmanship, and had been so little used, that it would have been, in reality, a fair exchange for the new one presented by Annie. "Why then should he be ashamed of it?" As Frederick Desborough repeated this question to himself, he went on turning over the leaves of the book from beginning to end, till he at last observed, on one of the pages originally left blank, some writing which was certainly not Langton's. He stopped to read; he examined the characters; and he saw the name of "Oswald Langton" in Lady Carew's writing, with, beneath it, the Italian words "Pegno d'amore." His first impulse was to dash the book at once into the muddy waters, in which its thankless owner had meant to plunge the disdained "pledge of love." But his next was to place it in his bosom, with the intention of one day comparing it with that which he had seen, both in Florence and at Moreleigh Abbey; for, though the writing contained in it was very near to a damning proof of that he least wished to believe, still he might mistake the identity of a specimen only exemplified in so few words, and he would not allow himself to acknowledge the fact of Oswald Langton's having been his favoured predecessor, till he had been convinced, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the two sets of tablets were the exact matches they appeared to be, and therefore, likely to have been procured together for the purpose of a loving exchange. *He* had never received any present from the "lady of his love," who would neither accept from him the slightest token, nor allow him

to snatch so much as a fragment of ribbon to make a relic of. She always told *him* that his regard, if worth anything, had no need of such reminding; while she herself valued it on its own account as highly as it deserved, without any wish to see it displayed in the shape of presents, the feeling of which the world was so apt to misinterpret! Langton might have hung about her as he himself had, and been finally repulsed for some act of presumption; but if so, how was it that she who had professed to relate to him her "whole history," should, in the full tide of her abuse of Oswald, have never mentioned him as an admirer of her own? Yet as the admirer of some person who was not Kate, she *had* mentioned him; had dwelt on his passionate and absorbing love for that "lady in Paris," upon whom he had turned his back, at once and for ever, the instant he heard of Miss Desborough's good fortune. That woman had loved him, it was plain; Isabella called her "the victim of his treachery," but her name she refused to impart. Why was she so scrupulous? He had never been able to divine; but there might be a key to the mystery, if—he shudered anew as he imagined the possibility—if Isabella had been the victim, and Oswald the traitor! Subtle beyond his years, in many points, Desborough felt instinctively that his intended brother-in-law was a man so sure to achieve the utmost in whatever he was engaged in, that—if he had been Lady Carew's lover at all—he was most unlikely to have occupied the position on such terms as he himself was, as yet, fain to be contented with. But he must know —he must be certain—to exist longer on the rack

of doubt was impossible. Yet, how satisfy the agonising curiosity that devoured him? At Wyngate he could learn nothing more; and at Wyngate he had promised his mother to remain over Saturday, over the morning, at least, on which she expected him to "give away" his sister. But when he made that promise, he had thought the Carews' absence from Moreleigh Abbey would have been longer; a letter from the lady had *now* made him aware that they were to return on that very day—why should he stay where he was to consume away his life in wretchedness and suspicion, when at Moreleigh he might, perhaps, prove to himself that that suspicion was groundless? He would go—he would set off that very afternoon; he knew he could not arrive that night, but if he spent it at an inn, he had a better chance of sleeping *there*, than under the same roof as Oswald Langton. Having come to this determination, he walked home, this time by a real short cut, and entered the house just after the assembled family had sat down to luncheon. Mrs. Oakly heard, with no small annoyance, that her son was "just then" going to absent himself for the next three days, at least, and the Murrays thought him "very cool;" while Oswald and Katherine, knowing something more of the youth's inclinations than the rest, could feel no surprise at his impatience to return there, where he had left his heart, though they had neither of them the least guess at the particular thing that was hurrying him away. His mother did not venture to oppose his departure, which took place soon after luncheon; but when she besought him, as he was starting, "to be sure to

be home again by Friday evening," he answered in a reckless tone:

"Yes, if I can, mother; I'll be back here for your wedding, at least. Only, if I'm late, you can't wait for me, I know."

"My dear Fred," cried she, anxiously, "I *do* hope there is no doubt about it! You know I have always made it such a point with your uncles that *you* should give dear Kate away, and it would seem so odd if you weren't here after all!"

"I'll be here if I can," replied he, impatiently, and rode off at full speed, devoting his uncles to the gallows between his teeth.

CHAPTER XI.

The small pocket-book picked up by Fred Desborough had been in truth, as he suspected, a gift from Lady Carew to Langton, who had, at the same time, presented her with its fellow, after writing in it, beneath her name, a title corresponding to that found in his own in her handwriting. This exchange was made at the time when the enchantment in which she held him was at its strongest, and the trifle bestowed had been prized accordingly; but as her influence declined, so did his value for this love token, the existence of which among his goods and chattels he had absolutely forgotten, till, to his horror and amazement, he drew it forth from the pocket of a waistcoat he had not worn since last year. That the turns of his face had betrayed him to one who watched his every look and motion, in order to "weigh evidence" for and against the reality of jealous speculations, Langton never dreamed; for, though he plainly felt that young Desborough disliked him, his regarding him with suspicion of any kind was necessarily unknown to him. The pocket-book once out of Annie's reach, his only after fear had been lest Kate should inquire the cause of his disturbance. To name the name of Lady Carew

to her—or before her—was odious to him; and, though his repugnance to seeing her choose the ornament that so strongly reminded him of the guilty past had outweighed his abhorrence of alluding to her, his having done so, only the night before, had by no means blunted his feeling on the subject. When certified, therefore (as he was the first time of their being alone together), that his playful struggle with Annie had only struck her as such, his relief was inexpressible, and he had felt able—and permitted—to rejoice "his heart within," at having at length rid himself of that last reminder of his former connection with Lady Carew. That Katherine had not seen, and consequently did not inquire the cause of a change of countenance which must have been as remarkable to the gaze of deep affection as to that of jealous hate, was simply owing to a momentary slip of Louisa Murray's foot, which, making her seize hold of her cousin's arm, had obliged the latter to withdraw her eyes from Annie and Oswald at the precise instant when he started, in such dire dismay, at the sight of his own pocket-book. When she looked again he had recovered himself; and thus it was that he escaped the fresh humiliation of accounting for his strange emotion by a detail of circumstances which, if they involved nothing new or surprising to Katherine, would have been, at least, calculated to increase the inward disturbance which so constantly affected her.

As the week wore on, business of every sort, from the trying on of gowns to the signing of papers, appeared to grow and multiply to that degree that she had not time to cast her thoughts

either forwards or backwards in any separate or defined train of reflections, but was only sensible of a general and all-pervading sensation of worry and disquiet, after which she sought her bed at night with a feeling not unlike that of an animal which hurries to its lair after having been all day pursued by the hunter. Excessive weariness had, however, for the most part, the fortunate effect of sending her speedily to sleep, though the mental and bodily agitation to which she was a prey, prevented that sleep from being either sound or long; for she generally waked from it soon after dawning, to lie for two or three hours in restless inaction, striving to think of nothing, but haunted and beset by every thought and fear least likely to permit repose. But the very consciousness of this trouble of mind, the secret of which must be kept, at any cost, from those around her, made her feel it such an absolute necessity to maintain the appearance of tranquillity, that she gave bystanders the impression of being "remarkably self-possessed." Mrs. Oakly, indeed, whose ideas of emotion were chiefly connected with weeping and hysterics, could not contain her wonder at what seemed to her her daughter's stoicism, observing over and over to Mrs. Murray, "that she really was astonished, considering dear Kate's sensibility of character, at her taking everything so quietly, and her being so little moved or agitated at the near approach of what was such a crisis in every young woman's life!" With Oswald she was scarcely ever alone; and when she was, could rarely do more than breathe, from the tension and

constraint in which the remainder of the hours was passed.

"You will hardly believe," said she on the Thursday, while sitting with him on a bench in the garden, during one of these short intervals, "you will hardly believe, I daresay, that I am happy, and at rest, while I am left here with you; for I am sure I look as I feel—worn out and stupid; but I have no part to play with you, and that is such a comfort!"

"And I have no part to play with you, Kate, either, thank Heaven! and I may ease myself by telling you that, though each day brings me nearer to that which puts an end to doubt and dread, yet each day finds me more superstitiously fearful lest some sudden gulf should open between us!"

"We must always go through so much suspense and uncertainty in our way to what we wish for!" observed Katherine.

"Yes, of course; but when one knows one has partly one's self to thank for the slipperiness of the ground one stands on, one requires the more nerve to keep one's footing."

"You are not on slippery ground, Oswald!"

"Not as regards you, dearest; no—no, I am not so ungrateful as to mean that; but there are those who might yet hurl me down from my height of happiness before I have reached the pinnacle! And to think that if it had not been for that horrid put-off in honour of Uncle Peter, you and I should be travelling away together by this time! Whereas now I am not safe till noon on Saturday."

"I wish Saturday were come and gone!" cried she, hastily.

"Well, I don't expect to be very unhappy on Sunday or Monday," returned he, smiling, "so I give you leave to wish Saturday well over; and, in the meantime, as I can't write more before starting for the Moat this afternoon, and I am to remain there till that day which alarms you so much, I must ask you to give me a pretty fair character for patience and temper in the few lines you are going to add to my letter to Cecy. I deserve some credit, I assure you, for going off so quietly! (mind, she says in hers from Coblentz, that our next is to be directed to St. Goar), and if you will answer her questions properly, I shall call you a very good girl, and will try and take the flatness and suspense of the next forty-eight hours as a penance to be set against that of being looked over by your uncles, and seeing before me the agonized face your mother would have on for fear of my saying a word that went against the notions, real or supposed, of the folks she stands in such awe of! My father will neither know nor care about anything of the sort, nor will Alexander, for that matter. But there is Louisa Murray beckoning to you from the house, Kate. I suppose you are wanted for some affair of life and death, and they think they have all a better right to you than I have till Saturday!"

"Don't be angry, Oswald! if you will only be good, I will be in the library to say good-bye to you, ten whole minutes before you go!" and so saying she joined her cousin, who had been sent to fetch her, by Mrs. Oakly, for a consultation on

the weighty business of how everyone was to be placed that day at the dinner table, where Mr. Langton and old Mrs. Tynedale would be guests, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Desborough.

After much talking, backwards and forwards, it was settled at last; but then came the question of how to dispose *properly*, both of Uncle Peter, who was to arrive next day by dinner-time, and of the unexpectedly large party the Herbert Desboroughs were bringing with them? Now this question need never have arisen, if Mrs. Oakly would have consented to make use of her son's room; but even while admitting that it was more than likely he would not appear till Saturday morning, she still choose to behave as if it were probable "that dear Fred might be back on the Friday evening." Such being the case, it was with considerable relief that she listened to her sister's suggestion of "how easy it would be, as Mrs. Tynedale dined there that evening, to ask her to play the part of a friend in need, and give Annie a bed on the Friday night." Katherine privately thought it was an arrangement Annie would not at all like; but as it seemed really the best way of getting rid of the whole difficulty, she said nothing against it. There still remained a whole train of minor problems to be solved, all connected with the approaching event, and all rendered matters of worrying importance, through the fidgety state into which the mistress of Wyngate was invariably thrown, by having to decide on anything, even the merest trifle, that went beyond the bounds of daily routine. Every time that Katherine showed quietly how this or

that (generally the simplest things on earth) could be managed, without extraordinary trouble or confusion, her mother observed, turning to Mrs. Murray, "that it was so fortunate for dear Kate *she* never was nervous."

"It would be strange if I could be, about *these* things!" thought her daughter, who went on doing her best to smooth all the details which appeared so terrific to Mrs. Oakly; and, while patiently submitting to the implied charge of insensibility, congratulated herself on the total blindness of those around her.

The dinner party, the thoughts of which made Mrs. Oakly so "nervous," through her anxiety on the subject of precedence, though of that species generally denominated a "family dinner," was a tolerably numerous one; and as it included Mr. Wellsted, the clergyman of the Oaklys' parish, another who came from a little distance, Richard Slanning (Annie's attendant in the hunting-field), and a nephew of Mrs. Tynedale's, unexpectedly arrived from abroad, the common misfortune of country dinner parties, namely, lack of gentlemen, was on this occasion avoided. It was, moreover, as far as concerned the younger part of the community, lively, though probably not so to the lady of the house, who, as her daughter plainly saw, was made to wince terribly when Mr. Herbert Desborough inquired, in his most solemn tone, "where Fred was? and when she expected him?" In the evening, too, it appeared to her, not only from the portentous length of Uncle Herbert's visage (which might be entirely owing to the "imprudent step" she was herself about

to take), but from sundry odds and ends of his conversation which reached her ears, that her uncle looked upon Fred's absence from this family meeting as a sort of disrespect to himself, for which he wished to *punish* her mother. It seemed, also that, whatever truth there might have been in Lady Carew's assertion, "that he and his wife had by this time determined not to risk their own credit by any extra zeal in the support of hers," still, the grievance about Moreleigh Abbey was not forgotten, and she gathered, farther, that with "amiable inconsistency" her Uncle Herbert was at one and the same time displeased with Langton for refusing to go there next month, and with Fred for being there at that moment. Mrs. Desborough, too, was evidently inflicting her share of annoyance, in subjecting her sister-in-law to a sort of catechism, as to where Katherine and her husband were to live, what was to be the nature of their establishment, etc., etc. Now, anyone endowed with a little more strength of character than Mrs. Oakly, would have found it as easy as natural to reply—"Kate and Oswald are going to hire a house in ——shire, belonging to Aunt Judith; there is land enough about it for him to try his hand at farming; it is a good hunting neighbourhood also; and—as to the number of servants or horses they may keep—they do not yet exactly know themselves." But Mrs. Oakly had no strength of character, and as she instinctively felt that the chief part of the questions (though harmless enough in themselves) were only put for the purpose of eliciting facts which might enable her cross-examiner either to say that her

niece and Langton were going to live "very wretchedly," or "very extravagantly," or perhaps both, she could hardly give a connected answer, and sat looking more and more nervous, and more and more helpless, till, to the sorrow of the two Murray girls, but to their aunt's infinite relief, the party broke up.

CHAPTER XII.

ALMOST the first thing Mrs. Oakly did next morning was to go into her daughter's room, to exclaim, "I do trust Fred will be here some time to day! You expect him, don't you, Kate?"

"Indeed, mamma, I hardly know whether to do so or not."

"It is on account of your uncles that the uncertainty annoys me. Herbert Desborough looked so shocked when Mr. Oakly expressed some doubt as to his coming in time for the wedding!—not that I think *that* possible, and so I said; and I am very sorry Mr. Oakly spoke so inconsiderately; but I own I should be terribly vexed if Fred staid away; for, independently of your uncles and the Langtons, it would look so very odd in the neighbourhood, after I have told everybody he is to give you away too! Surely Lady Carew knows the day is fixed for to-morrow?"

"Yes, mamma, she must, for I begged Fred to tell her that, the first time he went to Moreleigh Abbey."

"Then you didn't write to her?"

"No, mamma; that was not the least necessary."

"She must have thought it very strange, I am afraid; but still, I wonder she should not remind Fred a little that he ought not to be from home just at this moment."

Katherine did not wonder at all; but her mother was luckily called away before any reply appeared necessary, and no sooner was she gone than Annie ran in to pour forth all *her* grievances. They were many and various; but all proceeding out of the fact of her being condemned to sleep that night at Mrs. Tynedale's, "when who knew whether she would be able to be back early enough next morning to preside, as leisurely as she wished, at the dressing of Edith and Julia, in order to see them, and Emma and Mary Desborough too, properly arrayed in their bridesmaids' costume, before she put on her own?" "For," as she observed, "neither Miss Freeman nor Cox had an idea of what the real effect ought to be."

"And all this doubling of hurry and confusion," vociferated Annie, "will be because of mamma's choosing to keep Fred's room empty for him, when I'm sure, if he drives up here in a post-chaise by ten to-morrow, it's the earliest *I* expect to see of him! As if—supposing he *does* come to-night—he couldn't sleep at the White Hart, as he has done, more than once, before now, to please himself, when he was afraid of being thought too late home! But it's not only about the dressing I care; that is not at all what I think most of!" proceeded Annie, vehemently, as the tears started into her eyes; "the worst is, that I shall miss my last, last bedroom chat with you, Kate!"

After these words, it was hard work for Katherine to attempt to comfort her, more especially as whatever she said only drove Annie into farther details illustrative of the disadvantage, to herself and the public, of her being what she called

"turned out of doors" that night, intermingling her childish complaints with the often repeated ejaculation, which went to her sister's heart, of, "Oh, Kate, what shall I do when you are gone?"

"I didn't know," continued she, "how I should feel when your wedding-day was coming on! And between all these plagues, and your leaving us, I'm downright wretched!"

"Dear Annie, you will come and stay with me, before very long! won't you like that?"

"Oh yes, dear Kate, but it will be *very* long first!"

"Not so very, I hope," replied Katherine; "but don't cry, Annie! for—do you see, dearest—*I* must not cry!"

"Yes, I see, I understand; but it's very hard too; still, for your sake, I won't make a goose of myself, if I can help it!"

During the whole forenoon, the Miss Murrays made themselves most good-naturedly useful by playing at billiards with Mr. Langton and Alexander, and with Mr. Desborough, when he condescended to unbend so far; while Mrs. Murray, Mrs. Desborough, and Mrs. Oakly sat together, in solemn conclave, in the boudoir, and Mr. Oakly fidgeted about from the study to the stable, and from the stable to the gardener's Lodge, giving orders and counter-orders for the morrow, in the midst of which he walked off to the Vicarage, "to make sure that Wellsted thoroughly understood about the hour next morning."

On the plea of its being "Kate's last day," Annie got herself excused all her lessons, and though she honestly endeavoured to keep her

promise of "not making a goose of herself," still she followed her sister about from room to room, and clung to her with caresses which it would have required a harder heart than Katherine's to check, but which every now and then threatened to overset her own firmness. Annie also accompanied her in the afternoon, when she went to pay her farewell to Mrs. Tynedale, as well as to several old people in the village, on whom she had been in the habit of calling occasionally, from which duties they only returned just in time to welcome "Uncle Peter," on his arrival from London. He was a somewhat stiff old bachelor, who, if he was, on the one hand, a trifle less given to directing and advising than Herbert Desborough, was, on the other, so much more punctilious with respect to small duties and proprieties, that Mrs. Oakly was even more disposed to quail under his look of scandalised amazement on hearing of Fred's absence, than she had been the day before under his brother's observations on the same fact. In one sense, it is true, Uncle Peter was a still more important person than Uncle Herbert, inasmuch as having neither wife nor child, speculations might be hazarded as to how he would leave the handsome competence of which (as Mrs. Oakly frequently observed) "it was quite impossible that he, living as he did, could spend half the income." If, however, she expected that any of this "competence," or these "savings," were ever likely to come to her or hers, she was grossly mistaken, for Peter's affections, so far as he had any, were concentrated in his brother Herbert's family, though he might, perhaps, have diverted some part of the

golden stream with which he intended one day to benefit them, had his niece Katherine married "more satisfactorily"—*i.e.*, married a rich man. Such as he was, his presence was not likely to prove enlivening, and as no neighbours were asked to the dinner party of that day, things went on very flatly, in spite of the efforts of Mr. Oakly and the Murrays.

Both during dinner and in the evening, Mrs. Oakly sat listening to every ring, hoping it might be the door bell, back or front, announcing Fred, who never came; and Uncle Peter for a long time monopolized Mr. Oakly, for the purpose of getting out of him, to a penny, what might be the sum total of Lewis Markham's income, in which, as in most matters pertaining to wealth, he appeared to take a deep interest. About nine o'clock, Katherine had to leave the room to say good night to Annie, who, after making a desperate effort with her mother for leave to sleep with Katherine, and being very sharply reproved for her "most inconsiderate request," was now going off to Mrs. Tynedale's, with a full heart, under the escort of one of the maids. When Katherine returned to the drawing-room, she seated herself on a sofa, where she seemed to hear nothing but a buzz of voices, out of which the first thing she distinguished was a remark from Mr. Oakly, now free from Uncle Peter, on the utter improbability of Fred's arriving that night. It is probable that this remark suggested the question she next heard addressed by Uncle Peter to Uncle Herbert, in what was meant for an under tone, as to "whether their nephew had any very strong feeling with

regard to the connection about to be formed?" She did not catch the answer made; but presently, as her uncles passed together behind her sofa, she heard Herbert say, "One couldn't expect he should *like* it, you know; but still there are things to be observed on these occasions, pleasant or otherwise."

A few weeks back she would probably have been very much nettled at perceiving the small amount of restraint her uncles judged it necessary to place on *their* "feelings with regard to 'the connection;'" but after the struggles of mind from which she had hardly ever been free since the day of Lady Carew's visit, the contemptuous lack of consideration shown by the Desboroughs seemed too small an evil to be felt as such. Their objections to her marriage were, she knew, founded on none but the most thoroughly worldly calculations, and were despised by her accordingly; yet was she reminded by the sight of their insolently exhibited prejudice, that as strong, perhaps a stronger, objection to the choice she had made, would probably (if all were known!) awake in the bosom of more than one true friend, whose standard of happiness and honor was far as the poles asunder from that of her kinsmen. The feeling that pressed thus heavily on her had not power to change her resolution; but it struck her as being in itself ill-omened—inauspicious—and she retired to rest ejaculating inwardly—"The die is cast! I shall be Oswald's wife to-morrow! God send it be for good, and not for evil!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE morrow came, and began well, at all events; for—in spite of an "ugly look about the clouds," which had alarmed Mr. Oakly the night before—the weather was bright and beautiful, and promised, as the learned asserted, to be "steady." Mrs. Tynedale's considerate kindness also enabled Annie, notwithstanding her dismal forebodings, to be home early enough to assist at the toilet of all the "most important personages of the day," and to get the home-brigade of infant bridesmaids reviewed and approved of by Mrs. Murray, Mrs. Desborough, and even by the bride herself, before little Mildreda (last and least of the band) arrived, with her mother, from the Moat. Spencer Langton and Oswald had gone direct to the church, whither (if the wedding was to take place at all that day) it presently became evident that everyone else must soon repair, without farther waiting for Fred, of whom even his mother began to despair, though she still refused fully to admit the slenderness of her hopes by formally requesting Mr. Herbert Desborough to perform that office of "giving away his niece," which she had so especially retained for her graceless son. At last, however, when the Selwyns, and every guest expected (for the ceremony) had arrived, time grew so precious,

that Mr. Oakly was obliged to interfere with authority, and having himself negotiated with Herbert Desborough the business of the giving away (of transacting which his weeping wife declared herself incapable), the procession of carriages was set in motion, and the bridesmaids were sent forward to receive the bride, who, with her mother and her Uncle Herbert, followed in the rear. During the ceremony a very pretty group was formed by the Murrays, the Selwyns, Annie Oakly and her little sisters, the two Desborough children, and Mildreda Langton, who, conscious of her own finery, and amused with what was going forward, enjoyed her dignity without any drawback. Not so poor Annie, who wept and sobbed so violently, that Nurse Cox (who, with the heir of the Oaklys in her arms, stood close behind) was on the point of taking her out of church. Mrs. Oakly, Mrs. Murray, and Mrs. Desborough wept also, but with more decorum; while the bride, though deadly pale, shed no tears whatever; and the bridegroom's gravity—nay, almost severity—of aspect was such, that his brother Alexander afterwards observed to one of the Murrays, "that Oswald really looked as if he were being literally—not figuratively—'turned off!'" Mrs. Spencer Langton was all smiles and lively importance, which appeared in the stronger relief from being contrasted with the stately solemnity maintained by the Mr. Desboroughs, from which they did not even relax when, after the signing of names in the vestry, they offered their formal congratulations.

"The deed is done!" said Langton to Katherine, as they passed from the church-door to the

carriage, through the assembled crowd of villagers. "The deed is done!—nothing can part us now!"

"Only one thing, Oswald!"

"I know; but I would have bargained for that 'one thing,' three days hence, if that had been the price set on you!"

"Don't speak so, pray! But," continued she, "whatever comes, I am thankful the deed is done; for now I can't but be right in loving you!"

"And you have been thinking yourself wrong all this time? Well—I mean to show you you were right! and if I bring you to confess that, I can afford to defy Fortune!"

They had scarcely returned to Wyngate, and were still standing in the hall, when Katherine's eyes were struck by a very shabby-looking post-chaise, hurrying on at full speed, considerably in advance of her Uncle Herbert's carriage, now just within the Lodge gates, and she exclaimed, in astonishment: "What can that be?" "It's Fred, after all," answered Langton; and Fred Desborough it proved indeed to be, who, jumping out of his vehicle ere it reached the door, in apparent uncertainty as to whether he were actually too late or no, inquired eagerly of the servants at the foot of the steps, if they were come from church, or going to it?

"Just come back, Fred!" cried Langton, as he and Katherine walked out under the porch to meet him. "Just come back!—so you have lost that part of the story."

"So I see," he replied, looking back upon the succession of well-appointed carriages and be-favored servants now coming up the approach, in

striking contrast to his hack-chaise and jaded post-horses in front of them.

The contrast could be hardly greater, however, than that presented by the haggard countenance and dusty travelling dress of the youth himself, beside the fresh attire and beaming looks of the bride and bridegroom, to whom he uttered no word of congratulation, nor even of greeting. "My watch must be slow; or else you must have gone to church earlier than my mother said you would," proceeded he, impatiently; "for I thought to have been here before you were off."

"Well, Fred," said his sister, offering to kiss him, "I am just as happy to see you, though we couldn't keep Mr. Wellsted waiting, you know."

He just touched her lips with his, and she felt that his hand shook violently during the moment that she pressed it. His face flushed for a second, but then grew absolutely colorless, as he said to Langton, in a hoarse voice:

"So you are married!"

"Yes, married!" replied his brother-in-law, smiling; "and if you had set out a little sooner, you would have seen me go through the operation in a very exemplary manner."

"What, come at last, Desborough?" said Alexander Langton, now rushing up the steps with the Murrays. "Better late than never! and, to be sure, you *are* in time for the second act of the performance, which," added he, in a lower tone, "is, in my opinion, and yours perhaps, the best worth assisting at. Glad to see you, anyhow."

"Come this way," returned Fred, taking Alexander by the arm. "Come this way to my room!

I must make myself 'fit to be seen,' before I encounter the scolding I shall get from those fools of girls, or the solemn lectures of my wise uncles! I'll be hanged if I would have come at all, if I hadn't reckoned to have been here three-quarters of an hour good before now!"

"Well—well," said Alexander, as they turned together into the apartment so religiously kept vacant, in which everything Frederick could—or could not—want, had been already prepared, to facilitate the process of his dressing when he arrived, "your being a trifle late doesn't signify now!—you are all right for the chickens and champagne; I'll tell you about the rest, if you like."

"Thank you, I can dispense with it. The truth is, if I had been here before, instead of after, what they have been about, I could and would have prevented it."

"Nonsense, Fred!" cried Alexander Markham, "you are joking!"

"I tell you I could have let Kate know that of your brother there, that would have made her turn him off at the church-door!"

"Ah! I see!—you have been hearing of some Paris peccadillo of Oswald's from the Carews! I suppose he has had his, like other folks; but really, Desborough, I am glad you *are* too late; for it's a shame to rip up old stories; and I verily believe, that if Kate had done as you think she would, Oswald would have blown his brains out!"

"Do you?" asked Fred Desborough, between his set teeth. "Well! he won't just yet then—that's all. What the women see in him, I can't make out!"

"He is better than many they go mad for," observed Alexander; "but tell us now, what *have* you heard? I can keep counsel, you know."

At this moment they were interrupted by a tap at the door, which Fred was obliged to open to his mother, who, amidst her joyful yet tearful caresses, evinced such an anxiety for his being "soon ready," as put it in his power to get rid of her speedily, on the plea of his hurry to accomplish the change of costume needful, before presenting himself to the worshipful company now assembling. Her visit had however the effect of restoring to her son just so much self-command and power of reflection as enabled him to reply in a less intemperate tone to Alexander's repeated questions, "that he supposed there *was* no use in ripping up old stories, and that therefore, 'the least said was soonest amended.'"

"The fact is, Alexander," continued he, "that, as I told you in London, I would rather have had a brother-in-law lower down in the family; for independently of—of what it's no use publishing now—Oswald has a kind of way with him I never could get over! And they all think so much of him too, and talk as if he were so much better than you or I! But the thing's past praying for by this time, so I rely on you, you understand, for not bringing me into a scrape."

"You may, you may," answered he; "and one of these days I look to having my discretion rewarded, by your giving me the fun of a good laugh against the bridegroom. I shall enjoy *that*, though I'm clear against setting folks by the ears when they think each other delightful; why should one?"

Fred made no particular reply, but proceeded so

rapidly with the business of dressing as shortly to transform his appearance from that of a way-worn wanderer into something more befitting that of a bridal guest. But, though he had thus duly put on his "wedding garment," his countenance had undergone no change, and he looked as black as midnight when Alexander reminded him "that they must be moving."

"I suppose we must," said Fred, sulkily. "I'll see and sit by Mrs. Spencer; it's easy getting on with her."

"Oh, Alicia's famous, for she keeps running on for ever without giving you the least trouble," cried his friend.

"And you take one of my cousins, *do*, Alexander; *I* can't get on with young ladies!"

"Nor I neither! if I could—who knows?—I might have spared my most affectionate family the expense of packing me off to Madras, and been the bridegroom myself! but if it will oblige you, I'll do my best with one of the bridesmaids."

So saying, they went out of the house, to join that portion of the community which was not set up stiffly in the drawing-room, but wandering easily up and down the lawn, or else seated in the shade, with full view of the sunshine. But neither sunshine nor shade had charms for Fred, and though his uncles took the line of treating his offences rather with silent contempt than with positive reprimands, and only revenged themselves by doing what he was sincerely obliged to them for, namely, by entirely taking *his* office, and behaving—in the matter of proposing healths, etc.—exactly as if he were not in existence, his mood

remained unaltered. He fulfilled his intention (which, luckily, was about the most suitable thing he could do) of taking Mrs. Spencer Langton in to breakfast; but neither her talk, nor the copious draughts of champagne he swallowed, were able to enliven him; he left the table as soon as he could, and he was moping gloomily in the library, when he was found there by his sister, who, having just put on her travelling dress, and not liking to depart without something more than a public farewell to him, drew near and said: "Give me a better kiss, now I'm going, Fred!" He did this time kiss her warmly and repeatedly, but without saying a word.

"You look unhappy, Fred!" said she. "Oh, if you could but tear yourself altogether from Moreleigh Abbey!" added she, in a whisper.

"I have torn myself from it! I am not going near it again, I can promise you!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed she, fervently.

"You thank God for it, do you?" said he, with a bitter sneer.

"Yes, Fred, for whatever has led to it, and how much soever it costs you now, you will be the better and happier for it in the end."

So saying, she once more embraced him tenderly, and hastened away in obedience to a shrill call from Annie and her two little sisters, while her brother, now left alone, leaned his tall, slight form against the panel, and looking upwards with a chafed rebellious glance, repeated, in a low, angry tone her words, "better and happier!"

"I don't feel," proceeded he, mentally, "as if I ever could be good or happy! How should I? It's easy for her to talk, when she has got all she

wishes for, such as it is! And it's easy for people to go on about receiving the due reward of one's actions, obtaining one's deserts, and so forth! I wonder where retributive justice is to be found, when Oswald Langton, after the deeds he has done, is given the woman *he* now loves best in the world, and the half of my inheritance with her, while I am fooled and duped on all hands, and forced to give a brother's name to my worst enemy!"

The sound of approaching footsteps interrupted the course of his angry reflections; he relaxed from his attitude of unresigned despair; and on the entrance of his cousins the Murrays, accompanied by Spencer and Alexander Langton, all rallying him on his peculiar mode of making himself agreeable, he, without making much of a reply, joined the party and went along with them into the drawing-room, where all the world was assembled, preparatory to the "going off" of the bride, who was in some other apartment, exchanging "last words" with her mother and Annie. There was such a general buzz of talk going on, that Fred's silence was the less remarkable; that is, there were few people disengaged enough to notice it; but Spencer Langton said to his brother Oswald:

"What sort of a young man is Fred Desborough, when you come to know him? I have thought him pleasant enough the few times I have met him before, and Alicia raves about him—but he is as sulky as a hound to-day; is he often so?"

"I wouldn't speak my mind of him to everyone," answered Oswald, "for I don't like to abuse Kate's brother; but between you and me, he is just what we used to call at school a regular 'bad

fellow;' neither heart nor principle, that I can find out. It is possible I may be biassed, for I am aware he dislikes me; but that is my private opinion of him; it needn't be communicated to Alicia."

Things were by this time coming to their crisis, the second crisis namely, the departure. In the confusion, Fred Desborough managed to escape shaking hands with Langton, without its being noticed that he avoided it; and he would have remained in the drawing-room, talking of he knew not what to Mrs. Selwyn, while the pair drove off, had not Mrs. Spencer Langton laid hold of his arm, and made him accompany her, whether he would or no, to Mr. Oakly's study, from whence, as she had already ascertained, a good view of the "start" was to be had. Katherine, meanwhile, had bid her farewells, and having seated herself in the chariot, looked back at her mother and sisters as they stood kissing their hands to her on the steps; but the last of her kindred whom she beheld as the carriage drove on, was her brother standing at the east window, without smile or greeting, a scowl of inextinguishable wrath and hatred on his brow.

"Oh, Oswald! how dreadfully Fred is looking at us!" cried she.

"Is he?" said her husband, coolly; "so much the worse for him! I'm sorry he can't bear me; I have tried to be friends with him, and it won't do. He may come to his senses by and by; but whether he do or no, he can't harm me now—this day's business puts me beyond his power!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE fine summer evening, something less than a fortnight after their marriage, Oswald Langton and his bride returned from a two days' sojourn in the pleasant little inn at Lodore, to their pretty cottage on the Ambleside end of Lake Windermere. On arriving, they found letters awaiting them; and both sat down to read their respective epistles before the still bright reflection of the newly departed sunlight should have faded into dusk. Oswald's letter was from his brother Spencer, and did not occupy him long, as it contained little else than the statement that all were well at the Moat, with the fact of his father's having passed a week there between his stay at Wyngate and his return home, where Mrs. Tynedale was now paying him the visit she had promised to repeat, when obliged to leave Shadworth so immediately after Cecilia's wedding; the whole being wound up with some questions about the price of a horse, and some affectionate messages from Alicia to Katherine. This being soon despatched, he had leisure to observe that Kate had received, not only a longer communication, but one which apparently occupied her attention far more, for he saw her turn a page backward, and read again what she had perused already; then sit reflecting for some moments with

the letter spread out before her, and then take it up anew to examine some postscript, or crossed conclusion.

"Is that from Wyngate, you are looking so grave over?" asked he, at length.

"Yes, it is; from mamma."

"I hope nothing's going wrong there?"

"They are all quite well; but—mamma is not at all in spirits—I wish the Murrays could have staid longer with her!"

"Then I conclude your mother, after having been in such a fright last summer lest you should be Miss Desborough for ever, wants you back again now? does she not?" asked Langton with a smile.

"No, I don't think so," answered Katherine, in a listless tone, as she slowly, but carefully folded up the letter which she still kept in her hand.

"Kate, speak truth; isn't Mrs. Oakly wanting us to go to her before paying our Shadworth visit? that's it—I'm sure! and you are looking so wo-begone, because you fancy I shall scold you for her impatience (which I certainly shouldn't gratify). Come, tell me what she says!"

"She says nothing about that; indeed, though I told you they were all well, I see in the postscript here that Mr. Newman has said so much about change of air, for her and baby and all of them, that they are going to Malvern for a month, at the beginning of next week."

This reply seemed to show he had been mistaken; but there was something hesitating in Katherine's voice, and a certain perplexity in her look, as she half unfolded the letter she yet carefully retained

upon her lap, which moved her husband to fresh smiles, as he said:

"Oh, don't fancy I want you to show it me! I know what a bore it is to have letters overhauled by people they weren't meant for, besides not caring to wade through any woman's epistles, but yours and Cecilia's—only if the difficulty you are in is not about changing the time of our visits, what is it?"

"I believe I was foolish not to say at once," replied she; "but I was thinking if I couldn't do without teasing you with all those things that are making poor mamma so unhappy."

"What things, Kate, dear? I'm sure, if you are teased, I have a legal right to a share in whatever teases you!" said he, gaily, as he placed himself beside her, on the little window-seat, where there was not, properly speaking, quite room for two.

"It is," answered she, slightly averting her face —"it is about things we have been so happy in never having to speak or hear of since I left home." Langton's countenance changed instantly; but he said nothing, and Katherine went on—"You know I told you then—when we were driving off, I mean —that Fred said he would never go near Moreleigh Abbey again; but after a few days he did, in consequence of a letter, they suppose."

She paused; and after a minute or two her husband said, in a tone as if he were forcing himself to speak:

"I hoped and believed he would have kept his word; but Mrs. Oakly *used* not to be annoyed at his going there."

"No," replied Katherine; "but now something has been said to Mr. Oakly that has opened her eyes, and it makes her very miserable. But the worst of all is, that Fred has persuaded my uncles to let him go abroad again, and the day before yesterday mamma found out he meant to travel with the Carews. It horrifies me to think what will become of him!"

As she finished these words her voice faltered, and tears filled her eyes; her husband drew her closer to him, and pressed her to his bosom long and warmly, but without opening his lips; and she sighed deeply as she felt the quick breathing which alone gave token of the painful emotions her tidings had awakened in him.

"I did not mean," she said, "to have worried you with this."

"And so, when you were sitting here in a brown-study just now, you were doubting whether to tell me at all, were you, poor child? You know it wouldn't mend matters for me to see you in sorrow, and not learn its cause. I must have heard it sooner or later; and, painful as it is, after believing for this fortnight past that that boy's madness had, in some way or other, wrought its own cure, it is a burden I must bear. Only, Kate dearest," proceeded he, speaking quickly, as if to get rid of a disagreeable topic, "though I can't give you the consolation you would most value, can't tell you I expect him shortly to repent and amend his ways, I do not think it likely he should remain fettered there in an abiding manner. He can't marry her, Sir Edward is a great deal too conceited ever to see anything that might induce

him to make 'an example of him,' as he says he did of Mynheer Van Dunk, and before very long they must quarrel."

"That is what one is reduced to hope for," answered Katherine, sadly; "and if, as you think, it is likely, it would comfort me a little in a worldly point of view. But that is so small a part of the whole misery!"

"And yet the only part," observed he, bitterly, "which we are taught, by the world's instruction at least, to heed, until such time as it at last strikes us (in fear of utter ruin for ourselves or others) that we might as well have done, for the sake of obeying God's laws, what we are forced, in sheer utilitarian prudence, to wish we had done for any motive! However they may answer in the guiding of some natures, the rules drawn from expediency alone never yet reined in a violent passion; nor ever checked the impulses of a bold and adventurous character."

He was silent for some time; nor did Katherine utter a word, as she sat leaning her head on his shoulder with her eyes half closed, as if utterly absorbed in reflections too painful for speech.

"This business of Fred's is a bad one," said he at last; "a bad one, take it at its best of chances; nobody knows that better than I! but you, Kate, may count it for great comfort that in these misfortunes there is no thorn of self-reproach to wound *you;* that whoever else have guilt on their souls, *you* have none!"

"Oh, don't say that!" cried she, raising her head with a sort of start, and sitting upright beside him; "don't *you* say that, too! You don't

know what I have been reading in mamma's letter about her regrets at having had 'nobody to warn her' last Autumn when Fred was going abroad! She doesn't blame *me*, because, she says, she knows I had been 'too innocent' to guess at what she would give anything to have been told of; and I was *not* innocent! It is true I never expected—never foresaw—yet I did deceive her—never said a word to undeceive her, at least; and I see now that it may be that my not saying that word has helped my brother to destruction! But if I had said one thing, they would have asked others. I hadn't the courage. I kept silence, and—though somehow I *can't* altogether repent of what left it open—what made it possible to—yet, for all that, *I* feel it horrible to be called blameless—innocent—by you and by her; and the more I think of all I did and did not do last Autumn, the more bewildered and miserable I feel now!"

Her husband sat mournfully by, deeply hurt at perceiving, by her hopeless words and the violent emotion she gave way to as they burst from her, the whole extent of those scruples which, albeit she had overcome them in consenting to be his, still had such power to torment her. He had, however, love and gratitude enough in him to forbear giving full utterance to his wounded feeling; but when her sobs grew less frequent, and she folded her hands on her knees before her, he took one of them in his, and said in a low tone:

"As you 'can't altogether repent' not having done that which would have severed us eternally, neither can I be altogether unhappy; but . . ."

"Oh," interrupted she vehemently, "I see how

cruelly I spoke!" and she threw her arms round him with a passionate tenderness beyond what she had ever yet shown, saying, between the kisses she showered on him, like a child who seeks forgiveness, "I would not have done so, dear Oswald, but that I felt as if I were stifled; and to whom except to you can I speak?"

"To whom, indeed!" repeated he; "and, if you can believe it, Kate, I had rather you did speak out everything, though it carry with it an iron that enters my soul, than see you shut yourself up, and know you dare not tell what weighs on your mind, to me who alone can share—though it is not given me to soothe—it!"

"Yes, you do soothe it when you speak so!" whispered she.

"Then, Kate, go on, and never fear to tell me whatever is oppressing—disturbing you; I can bear an occasional sting, so you do but trust me! and, if it's not too painful to you, I think I had rather hear to-night than to-morrow morning, exactly how your mother is situated. Surely your Uncle Herbert cannot carry his regard for his wife's relation so far as to think this plan of Fred's a desirable one! If there were nothing else, there is the commission they have been waiting for so long."

"Oh, they have just had the offer of one; but Fred said at once (and I believe my uncles partly agreed with him) it was not in a regiment to suit him, and so . . ."

"And so, in these peaceable days, it will be a good while before they get the refusal of another!"

"They are prepared for that, I suppose, for I

believe it is mainly their being so puzzled what to do with him, and their fear of what he might rush into if thwarted, that prevents their objecting to his going abroad; if they knew everything, they might, perhaps; but Mr. Oakly can't persuade mamma to lay it all before them, because, as she says, it would be no use."

"How no use?—they are his guardians, and he is under age."

"Yes, and I know they might, and would if they were angry, refuse to give him money; but it is so easy for a young man with his expectations to get it lent him! I believe," continued Katherine, sadly, "that no earthly power can force Fred to bend his will to that of others; and if he chooses to go abroad, abroad he will go, let his guardians do or say what they please."

"If they please to make Fred a ward in Chancery (and they can if they like), I think he would find in that mighty man, the Chancellor, an 'earthly power' who would so contrive matters as to prevent his 'leaving this realm' without his permission."

"Do you think so?" said Katherine, quickly.

"There is no doubt about it," replied her husband; "and of course Mr. Oakly knows that as well as I do. But it won't be done if, as I suspect, your mother can't, when it comes to the point, make up her mind to urge the Desboroughs to what would anger Fred so bitterly at this moment; for *they* are not likely to take it up seriously (of themselves) unless, indeed, they happened to turn suddenly round and choose to be

'affronted' on their own accounts at his going abroad with people whom they have hitherto rather upheld than otherwise."

"If I were in mamma's place, I *should* urge them," said Katherine.

"Yes, my dear, but your mother is not at all like you. I pity her from my soul though; and if there were that thing I could do or suffer to lessen, by one tithe, the chances of permanent evil to your brother, I think you will believe I should not flinch from it!"

"I do believe you, Oswald; but you *cannot;* and mamma, as I feel too sure, *will* not do anything."

Her husband made no rejoinder; all had now been said; and the pair continued to sit in perfect silence, while the aspect of surrounding objects grew more and more indistinct in the increasing gloom now deepening into as much of darkness as ever enwraps a midsummer sky in the north of England. They had not however long looked out on the expanse of brown shadow which by this time veiled the face of all things, when the rising of the moon at once lent form, with a degree of color and sharpness of outline, to the landscape which had faded before their eyes.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Katherine; "and how that silver thread across the lake transforms the whole scene! It grows more and more lovely! Is it too late, Oswald, to stroll out and enjoy it better than from this window?"

He did not think it too late; and, as they wandered together by the side of the lake, "now

in glimmer and now in gloom," their spirits calmed down in a measure, after this unexpected agitation of a subject, from the perplexities of which they had hoped to live free, at least while on the banks of Windermere.

Windermere.

CHAPTER XV.

KATHERINE began the next day by writing to her mother; a painful business on every account, and not rendered less so by the sort of expression she saw on Oswald's face, if ever she looked up from her paper to reflect on how she had best turn what it was next needful to say. He had been very silent all the morning, had made no allusion whatever to the preceding night's conversation, and now looked moodily on (evidently not attending to the book the pages of which he sat turning over), without giving a word or a smile to her he watched so unremittingly. She inwardly determined not again to try him as she had unintentionally done the evening before, for she instinctively felt that the distress of mind she had betrayed must have put his endurance to a severe proof; and she was moreover aware, though she had probably never read Madame de Saussure's "Education Progressive," that, as a general fact, men abhor nothing so much as what the acute Genevese lady calls "Le mélodrame au logis." At long last her letter was written.

"Now, Oswald," said she, when it was finally closed and directed, "this weary business is done, and after duty comes pleasure; so take me out on the lake, or else come with me to where I began that sketch on Tuesday, whichever you like!"

His brow cleared at once; they went out on the lake, and spent the day, as they had spent many before, partly on the water, partly in exploring hitherto unknown paths and dingles on the shore. Other days followed, passed in like manner, the delight of which continued to be enhanced by the steadily fine weather (so rare in that land of lake and mountain) which it was their good fortune to enjoy almost uninterruptedly, till at last there came so damp and chilly an evening, that the window was shut long before bed-time, and there was even talk of a fire. The lowering appearance of the sky caused some discussion of the chances for and against their being able to accomplish a riding expedition to Langdale Pikes, Blea Tarn, etc., which had been thought of for the morrow.

"It's not worth while going, if it is not really fine enough to see the views properly," said Langton; "we have the rest of this week and the whole of the next before us."

The following morning was cloudy-looking, but there were occasional gleams of sunshine, and Katherine wondered, while she was dressing, whether Oswald would pronounce it a suitable day for the projected ride. It was exactly one of those we call doubtful; and yet the air was at once so soft and so fresh as to allure one to hope that the heavy vapours would keep their distance, or might be driven away by the light breeze which promised, every now and then, to disperse them. There was altogether something in the atmosphere Katherine thought inviting, and she therefore did not go at once to the sitting-room; but walking out into the garden to feel how pleasant it was, she went round

the little house till she came to the open glass door, within which she expected to find her husband waiting for her and for breakfast. She saw him as she drew near, but he did not look towards her till, standing on the step, she asked him "whether, in spite of the clouds, he did not think it a day to venture on the ride?"

He turned round and said, with a grave, careful face, "that he had not thought about it;" "for," added he, "I am not sure that we ought to stay here even this day longer; I have had a letter from Shadworth, which, I am afraid, may call us away from our Paradise."

"Is Mr. Langton ill?" asked Katherine.

"No—it's something about Alexander; but—you will best understand what is going on, and best judge of what we are to do, by reading my father's letter and Mrs. Tynedale's, for she has written also. There they lie on the table."

She accordingly took them up and read them, one after the other, while her husband walked up and down the room, making occasional remarks, half to her, half to himself.

"This is, in another shape, as bad a business as Fred's; for if Alexander's affairs can't be settled at once—out off-hand—which it seems to me scarce possible they should be, why, he loses the cadetship we looked to as giving him a chance, and I see nothing else before him than the life of a systematic gambler and blackleg, who will bring us all to utter disgrace! Lewis Markham can't have heard the whole truth, when he thought he had got to the bottom of his concerns, six weeks back! for one sees now there must have been accumulations of

debt. What folly in Alexander not to speak out then! But of course it's folly and cowardice combined that bring a man to such a pass, and we are not to wonder if he proceeds accordingly!"

With regard to Alexander Langton's affairs, during the last three months, Katherine's knowledge was the same as that of her husband and his family; combined with which, the information contained in the letters put into her hands amounted to this. Alexander, after having been supposed for awhile, by Cecilia and the rest of his relations, to be going on very quietly at Mr. Lane's, in Hertfordshire, did not eventually prove to have passed his time there so satisfactorily as they had hoped; and, moreover, openly expressed his disinclination to return to Oxford after the period of his rustication should be elapsed, adding, that if he *did* go back, he should never pass—"they needn't expect it." This occurred very shortly after his sister's engagement to Lewis Markham, who gave it as his advice to Mr. Langton not to urge his youngest son's adhering to pursuits he declared himself utterly averse to; and offered to exert all his interest in quarters where his residence and reputation in India had given him a certain influence, to procure his future brother-in-law that somewhat rare and often wished-for appointment, commonly known as a "Straight out Cavalry Cadetship." After some haggling, the plan was agreed to, with more of resignation than satisfaction, by Alexander, who was in consequence to start for Madras early in August, and the family thought themselves happy to have found an expedient by means of which, and by the immediate

discharging of some acknowledged debts of no great importance, they could place him in a situation where he might, if he chose, occupy an honorable position. He meantime, as Oswald now suspected, had not made a full confession of his difficulties; and the ordering of his outfit supplying him with pretences for several visits to London and its neighbourhood, he had in the course of them, as since appeared, through gaming and other acts of extravagance, fearfully increased the sum total of the embarrassments which already pressed upon him. But though his family plainly saw he did not give them the benefit of his *whole* time, and though they had reason to fear he spent the rest of it in less reputable company, his frequent absences from home were too habitual to excite much surprise. He had left Wyngate (for the Humes', he said) a day or two after Oswald's marriage; but, though no one saw or heard from him, it was still expected that—according to his brother Spencer's phrase—he would, as usual, "turn up again" presently, when the first note of alarm was sounded at Shadworth, by a vague rumour that Alexander had latterly existed in a state of dodging about, no one knew exactly where, in order, as it seemed, to avoid the consequences of "backed bills," and loans, obtained at usurious interest, etc., etc. The rumour occasioned inquiry; and upon inquiry it became evident that he had not only disappeared from the eyes of his kindred, but of his creditors, and that he had put the Channel between himself and their pursuit, though no certainty could be obtained as to whether he had made choice of Boulogne, Brussels, or Bonn,

as his City of Refuge. Mrs. Tynedale's letter expressed more plainly than Mr. Langton's the writer's opinion of the desirableness of Oswald's presence at Shadworth; he was not *asked* to come by either; but it was visible that no definite plan even would be devised without him, and equally visible that both his father and his mother's old friend agreed in looking to him as the only member of the family from whom help or counsel could be obtained in the present strait.

"Well, what must we do?" was the question asked as soon as Katherine had looked through the letters.

"Go to Shadworth directly, I should think," was the answer.

"I thought you would say so; and—I am afraid it does not admit of a doubt; for though of course the Moat is nearer to Shadworth than this is, still many things have prevented Spencer's judgment from having much weight with my father—at least it quickens his decisions so very little, that one can hardly say he heeds it at all. If any good is to be done, I must go—and go at once." He was silent for two or three minutes, and then added, "This cuts off eight—ten—days I had counted on as secure here; but there is no use in repining—and in another moment I shall go and see how soon we shall be able to start to-day."

He accordingly rose the instant he had breakfasted, saying however, as he went, "It *is* provoking to lose our last week!—but you are the best of good girls, Kate, and I'm ashamed to grumble." He was absent something more than half-an-hour, making inquiries in the adjacent village, and on

returning announced "that they had a reprieve," that is, that they could not get horses till the afternoon, whereby they should gain a few hours for themselves, while that delay would not make much difference in the end, since they might still hope, by late travelling, to reach Preston that night, which would probably enable them (as the next day's journey was to be partially shortened by railroad) to arrive at Shadworth by dinner-time on the morrow.

The clouds had vanished, and the weather was again beautiful; but the ride to Langdale Pikes was of course out of the question, so they contented themselves with a farewell row on the beautiful lake, which they had skimmed over the preceding afternoon, and for which they had now that feeling of affectionate regret with which one always looks one's last on the place where one is conscious of having enjoyed happiness which is unlikely to recur in the same kind and degree. Neither spoke much; and what few words they interchanged, were chiefly observations on the various points of view they had previously remarked admiringly to each other. At length, as they were steering homeward, and gradually losing sight of one principal feature after another, in that portion of the lake from which they were now turning, Langton exclaimed:

"We shan't see that again!" adding—with a kind of gloomy vehemence—"You don't know how I hate leaving this place!"

"I should be very glad to stay here too, if it were possible."

"But it's not possible because it's not right, you

mean," he observed moodily. "I wish you were not so extra good, Kate, about doing what you don't like! for if you would have sighed and wept, and declared me a barbarian for thinking of taking you away before the month's out, I should have a fair excuse, in most folk's eyes, for doing what I like myself!"

"Well, I would have given it you, Oswald, with great satisfaction, I assure you, had you been wished for at home for any reason short of doing your utmost to ward off disgrace and ruin!"

"Thou would'st not love me, sweet, so much, lov'dst thou not honor more!" murmured he, as he looked down on the clear water. "I wish I had met you sooner, Kate!" added he, raising his head and looking full at her. "I might, if I had not been a fool, I believe; but that is neither here nor there. Only I don't want you to fancy that when I said I 'hated leaving this place,' I just meant that I thought it very unpleasant to come to a speedier end than I expected of a careless, unruffled state of things in which I have you more to myself than I ever shall have you again! That's disagreeable enough, of course; but there is more besides; there is a something too—for all I fully believe you would give a good deal not to have to start off this afternoon—that touches *me* more than you. I have felt here not only as in a retreat, but as in a refuge from the thoughts and remembrances of all that is and has been passing in the world beyond those hills, till your mother's letter brought the whole back before me. I had thought to let *that* go to sleep again (perhaps you will say I was wrong there); and now I am dragged back into all I

most detest the contemplation of, through the necessity of talking over the details involved by Alexander's debts and how he incurred them. If I were sure I could do good!—but it is not for me to spare myself on the ground that 'when a man has once done this or that it is all over with him;' I have not been so dealt with myself, and I must do as I would be done by, though I confess that—no—I have no right to presume the worst of Alexander, because his tastes have been hitherto very unrefined; that makes no difference in right and wrong! Still, it is hard to be docked of one's best holiday; hard too to have a wife who *will* make one do one's duty!" concluded he, with something more of a smile than had yet sat on his lip that day.

"I believe you would have done it, at all events, Oswald, whether I saw it exactly as I do or no."

"What, you think I should have been good out of obstinacy? Well, perhaps there may be something in that! But the difference would be that, hard as it is, I should find it about ten million times harder to go in spite of you!—so, for all I said just now, I am thankful at bottom, Kate, that you are the bravest girl in England, to keep me up to the mark!"

Once out of the boat, and back in the cottage, there was an end of contemplative speeches and expressions of regret, for the moment of starting had so nearly arrived that nothing else could be thought of. Their journey indeed, or the first part of it at least, which was to take them, on a bright but not sultry day, through some of the most beautiful scenery of those beautiful districts, promised

to be in itself enjoyable enough; but both looked back sadly at the abode which had sheltered them so pleasantly, and Langton said:

"It's as if one was leaving one's happiness behind!"

"Why, Oswald, we are not going off different ways, are we?" asked his wife, smiling.

"No, Kate!—thank God, no! I was an ungrateful fellow to speak so! This time year I was travelling from the Moat by myself!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A LITTLE before dinner-time, on the day following that of their departure from Ambleside, the travellers arrived at Shadworth, where they found Mr. Langton eager to pour forth his fears and sorrows to his son, and Mrs. Tynedale sincerely glad to be, by their coming, relieved from her post of sole adviser and comforter to her old friend.

"You are very good, Kate!" exclaimed Mr. Langton, as he did full justice to the alacrity with which the call from home had been responded to—"very good indeed!"

"That she is," returned his son proudly; "and determined to make everybody else good too, I assure you! So if I *can* be of any use to you about Alexander, it will be thanks to her."

Mr. Langton's face clouded at the name of Alexander, and he said something about his fear of having broken up his children's happy sojourn on Windermere to no purpose, adding—"we will discuss this wretched business when dinner's over, Oswald."

There was accordingly nothing said, during the meal, of what chiefly occupied the thoughts of those who partook of it, and silence was just avoided by questions concerning that day's journey,

the "pro's" and "con's" of railway travelling, and the scenery of the North of England; but after the servants had retired, Mrs. Tynedale rose without further ceremony, and taking Katherine's arm in hers, led her out of the room, saying: "Best leave them at once, to get to the bottom of the whole affair undisturbed." When in the drawing-room, Katherine asked her old friend "whether, from what she had learnt, she considered that there existed any rational hope for Alexander and his prospects?"

"Why, my dear," said Mrs. Tynedale, "that's a matter that depends on what I am not—cannot be—precisely informed about; for even when one has known people as long as I have known your father-in-law, one can't ask them point-blank what their circumstances are; but, as far as I can make out, unless Alexander's debts, or the greater part of them, can be paid *at once*, without any delay, so as for him to be in England, ready to sail for Madras within three weeks, he loses his chance of everything that *may* lead to his passing fairly through life. Now the question is, has Mr. Langton got it in his power to come forward with such a sum *at this moment?* for, in the end, I feel convinced that he, or the family after him, will have to pay more, or to lose more I ought to say perhaps, by and through Alexander, than is needed to extricate him now. If it is in his power, it ought to be done; but people can so seldom make up their minds to a present sacrifice, though they know their shrinking from it only exposes them the more in future! This is what *I* am not so situated as to be able to urge (though I have stated my

opinions), and this is why I am so thankful that you—that Oswald—should have come; for I expect *he* will see directly, and will make his father see, that the decision must be formed instantly, and the money found and got ready forthwith, if any good is to be achieved. That is my chief reason for rejoicing—but it's not the only one; for the fact is, I was growing terribly nervous about Mr. Langton's being as good as alone (for the oldest friend is not like a son or daughter on these occasions), and as he had put off his cousins the Hinchcliffes, the moment he heard about Alexander, he would have been left actually alone the day after to-morrow; for I expect my sister-in-law, and *must* be at home to receive her; so you may judge of my satisfaction at seeing you drive up! I am glad, too, to find you can both do the right thing, even when it entails a bit of a sacrifice. Oswald always seemed unselfish as a boy; which made him his mother's favourite, and mine too; but—I may confess it to you now, for you know I had not seen him for years till last Christmas—I feared he was changed; and I can't tell you how happy it makes me to be shown he is the same at heart as ever! Or have you, Kate, had some hand in 'making him good,' as he said to-day?"

"I don't think I have a right to say that," said Katherine, blushing.

"No, not exactly, of course," returned the old lady; "for it is God Almighty who gives us our opportunities and chances for good; but, in quality of second cause, I have a notion, my child, that you have been instrumental in bringing him back to the old frank, affectionate nature which those

who have only met him abroad, I know, did not see in him. 'All's well that end's well,' however; and I think too highly of you both to feel obliged to condole longer with you on the cutting short of your honeymoon, provoking as it is!"

Katherine did her best to show by her manner that she did not expect any more praise on the subject, and proceeded to inquire when and from what place Mrs. Tynedale had last heard from Cecilia?

"Why, I think Basle was her last date; but," continued Mrs. Tynedale, "to let you into a secret, my dear, I have written to her—unknown to Mr. Langton—giving her a general idea of Alexander's situation (I only wish I could have told her, with any certainty, whereabouts he is skulking!), and saying the sort of thing that may (if your former lover takes to being as 'good' as your husband is) bring them back to England something sooner than was counted on."

"Oh, I am sorry you did that!" cried Katherine.

"My dear, *I* am not sorry, whichever way it turns," replied Mrs. Tynedale; "if they stay, it does not now matter (though, when I wrote, I couldn't be certain of what *you* would do), and if they hurry back—why—it may be tiresome in one sense, but in another, Lewis Markham's interest, and Lewis Markham's money, for aught I know, won't be things to be despised, under such circumstances as may arise with regard to Alexander, though, after all, my letter may not have reached, being despatched somewhat at a venture. So don't alarm yourself, dear Kate; but tell me now what

has taken all your people to Malvern? and are they really *gone?*"

Katherine replied that she believed the move was actually made; after which she and her old friend conversed upon a multitude of subjects, branching out of things connected with the Wyngate family and neighbourhood, yet every now and then returning to—glancing at—the Langtons and their affairs, till something like two hours had elapsed since they quitted the drawing-room. About the end of that space Oswald entered, with a contracted brow and anxious appearance; he went straight up to his wife, and said, in a blunt, business-like fashion—"I want to speak to you, Kate."

Now whether there was any real peculiarity in his way of uttering those very simple words, or that she had, in the last three weeks, grown so unaccustomed to what at all resembled the "ordering about" of her old home days, as to be struck with surprise by aught reminding her of it, certain it is that she was startled—alarmed even—by an indescribable something in her husband's tone and bearing. Before she could answer him, however, he added, "that he wished to speak with her alone;" and without waiting for farther reply, conducted her into a small room on the other side of the passage.

"I conclude you have heard from Mrs. Tynedale," said he, as he seated himself beside her, "that in this affair of Alexander's the chief difficulty lies in the necessity of someone's being able to produce a sufficient sum of money to pay—

and to pay at once—what is needful to enable him to show his face again time enough not to forfeit his only chance of having—what it has been the bane of us all to be without—a settled calling early in life. Now my father doubts, says he is not sure of what is in his power; and while he hesitates, the mischief will be done. It is, moreover, true that he is hampered by having given over to me, to facilitate our marriage, what would otherwise have been free to him to dispose of; so that I cannot say to him as I could have done a year ago, 'Retrieve Alexander's credit, at whatever cost, and I am content to be on the same footing as my brothers.' That money has become mine; but in becoming mine . . ."

"I see what you mean, Oswald," cried she, hastily; "I had been thinking of it before! It is only fair that we should give it; I think nothing too dear to pay for a rescue from shame and ruin! If money could but so rescue *my* brother!"

"Kate, dearest, you must listen a little farther; if I give, or rather if I raise the money to give (for that is how it will have to be done) what may be needful to secure the end we have at heart, you are to consider that our income for the next few years will necessarily be crippled; so much so, perhaps, that though I hope we may still be able to live at Calthorpe, it will not be in the way we expected; and that it might even be prudent to accept my father's proposal of residing—for the present, at any rate—with us, instead of with Cecilia. Are you prepared to make the every-day sacrifices such a change entails? and to bear, moreover, what all the Desboroughs will say about your

being 'spunged upon,' for the sake of getting one of those good-for-nothing Langtons' out of a scrape?"

"I should not scruple asking *you*, Oswald, to make a sacrifice for Fred, if that were in your power; and why should you doubt my willingness to do as much for what is as near you?"

"You are true metal, Kate! every day I'm with you, I see that more and more! I don't thank you, because there is only one way of thanking that is worth anything; but I shall have time for that if we both live. My father wouldn't listen at first to my doing this, because of delicacies to you, and so forth; but I thought I knew you better than he could, and so it proves! Now comes the worst part of the story though—" as he spoke he took a deep breath, and clasping her in his arms, hesitated a moment ere he could bring out the words: "For this generosity of yours to be of any avail, I must go—must set off from here in ten minutes."

"Without me, Oswald?"

"Yes, without you; you see that besides hurrying off to London, to ensure my being able to have money at command, if wanted, I must go on (if I am to go on to any purpose) with a speed you would hardly have strength for. I *may* find Alexander at Boulogne, but if not, I must travel farther; and if you broke down, I should either have to leave you behind in a foreign inn, or give up the affair altogether! Dear Kate, don't lose courage now, for if you do, how shall I go through with what I have undertaken?"

"I won't lose courage, I ought not!" returned

she, trying to steady her voice. "I see the impossibility of my accompanying you, see the necessity of your not losing a minute; only—this is what I never thought of!"

"It must be, Kate! it's a business I can't delegate, for no one else would have the same interest in it, and no one else would, I think, be so likely to make Alexander see he *can*, if he chooses, redeem past errors. But I little thought what was before me when you forbade me to murmur at leaving Windermere, since we did so together!"

At the sound of these words, and the tone of deep sadness in which they were uttered, all Katherine's firmness gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears.

"Don't mind me!" said she; "if I had expected it, I should have behaved better! but it is all so sudden. I don't know how to bear it. Yet I must bear it, and I will! I knew I should have to endure grief, as well as enjoy happiness through you. God send you safe and soon home to me, dearest Oswald!"

"God send it!" he repeated; and having once more strained her to his breast, he rushed out of the room, shook his father by the hand in the passage, and hastened away from Shadworth.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Fred Desborough started for Moreleigh Abbey, on the Monday previous to his sister's marriage, he travelled thither with the settled purpose of ascertaining a point which, in his opinion, would decide the question of whether he had, or had not, reason to look on Langton as the serpent who had already beguiled the Eve of his Paradise into concessions beyond any ever granted to himself, nay, beyond any he had ever yet hoped for. But the fever fit of jealousy which had driven him on in such haste, abated in some degree when he found himself in the bewitching presence of her he idolised. To forget the pocket-book and those fatal words within it, would have been impossible, even if, instead of retaining it for ever in his bosom, he had, like its original possessor, flung the "Pegno d'amore" into a ditch. But though, when alone, his suspicions invariably returned upon him, with more or less of power, under the influence of those eyes and that voice he was mad enough to doubt of any evidence that made against their language; and it was full as much the difficulty of tearing himself away from their fascinations, as the impulse to satisfy his doubts (whenever he should have the opportunity), that retained him fast bound

at Moreleigh, after he should have been travelling back to Wyngate, to perform the hateful duty of "giving away" his sister to Oswald Langton. Of the pocket-book, the object of his search, he had not a glimpse; he had so often seen it, so often carelessly handled it, at Florence and in London! Where was it now? Was it contemptuously cast aside like its fellow? Was it enshrined in some secret hiding-place, as a still cherished relic of a false lover, for whose sake Isabella Carew scorned the devotion she would otherwise have appreciated? If he could only see it, and discover that his imagination had deceived him, and that his greatest misery was founded on as thorough a delusion as forms the happiness of many! At length however, at past midnight on the Friday, when his last lingering intention of returning to Wyngate had been thoroughly and avowedly abandoned, as Lady Carew was looking in a small chiffonier for some manuscript verses she wished to show him, she threw out of this Liliputian treasury, along with other articles, the pocket-book he was so eager to examine. He succeeded, unnoticed by her, in getting it into his own hands; and, carrying it off to his own room, lost not a moment in comparing it with that which had been Langton's. They were matches—fellows! the only preceptible difference being that Lady Carew's was the more worn, and that the page corresponding to that on which she had written the name of Oswald Langton and the words "Pegno d'amore," had been, in her own, *carefully cut out.* He had sought this evidence, he had obtained it; a thousand remembrances rushed upon him to add strength to the proof on which his eyes

rested; and, combined with it, wrought in him such full conviction of what he had hitherto only admitted as a hateful suspicion, as determined him on the one hand never again to see Lady Carew, and on the other to revenge himself on Langton, by hastening to Wyngate in time to make his sister aware of that which would, he felt sure, lead to her discarding him, even if dressed for the wedding.

Now the relative positions of Wyngate and Moreleigh Abbey were such that, according to the old-fashioned modes of travelling, no plan of the kind could have been dreamed of; but Fred Desborough was aware that the opening, within the last two days, of some fifty miles of railroad in that direction, rendered the matter possible, and of that possibility he resolved to avail himself. Being very little under the sway of those sorts of difficulties connected with unseasonableness or inconvenience, which control some—otherwise uncontrollable—mortals, he called up his servant at half-past one, A.M.; managed, at whatever cost of trouble and ill-humour to grooms and gate-keepers, to leave Moreleigh Abbey by two, and sped forth as fast as horses and money could carry him. But when he reached "the railway in which he trusted," he was five minutes too late; and though there was yet a chance that the next train (for which he was forced to wait) might still enable him to reach home early enough to arrest the progress of the bridal party to church, the chance was but a bare one. He took it, nevertheless; hoping, to the last, that if he were himself wretched, the cause of his wretchedness should be made equally so. Nothing went well with him,

however, that night and morning; trains, turnpikes, horses, post-chaises, were all dead against him; and when finally frustrated of his purpose, and compelled, in a degree, to swallow the impotent rage that consumed him, it was so entirely beyond his power to do so with even a tolerably good grace, that had he not made the judicious selection of such a rattle as Mrs. Spencer Langton for his neighbour at the breakfast, his alternate absence and moroseness of demeanor could hardly have escaped public notice. His sister's farewell wrought a momentary, but scarcely a softening, change in the emotions that agitated him; for his whole fury had already returned upon him, when his darkly-clouded brow revealed something, at least, of the tempest within him, to the departing bride; and ere the last of the wedding guests had disappeared, he ordered his horse, without inquiring what the Murrays or Alexander Langton might be doing, and took a long and hard gallop through green lanes, where he might reckon with certainty upon meeting no mortal save an occasional tramper or gipsy. He got home just in time for dinner; after which he declared himself, in consequence of his night spent on the road, utterly unable to keep his eyes open, and retired to his room, whence he did not emerge till the rest of the community had returned from church next day. Having now, however, apparently slept off "his fatigue," as his mother called it, he behaved with fitting courtesy to his cousins, as well as to the Langtons—father and son; to all of whom he even seemed desirous of making amends for his neglect of them on the wedding day, while he

imperceptibly, but cleverly, took advantage of the number of those who had claims on his attention, to avoid any more "tête-à-tête" conversations with Alexander, who, together with his father, left Wyngate on the Monday.

On the following day the Murrays also departed; and Fred Desborough remained in his home in a state of gloomy abstraction, which excited no little alarm in Mr. Oakly, who considered it as the probable indication of his being in some scrape, as bad—possibly worse—in its consequences than that of the preceding year; while his mother, albeit alarmed likewise, persisted in declaring "that, though it made her very unhappy to see him look so ill, she understood it entirely: he couldn't bear the blank of his sister's absence—was anxious about her happiness, too; few, except herself, knew the strength of dear Fred's feelings." Poor Mrs. Oakly would have been a good deal taken aback had it been possible to give her, then and there, a sudden view of "dear Fred's feelings," everyone of which partook, more or less, of the rage with which he acknowledged his powerlessness to "execute judgment" upon the man who, thanks to *his* arriving half-an-hour too late, was actually his brother-in-law. How far this sense of the irrevocable nature of the past, which at the present moment but increased his despair, might have eventually deadened the revengeful fire that burned his bosom, it is impossible to say; for such a result could only have been looked for had he adhered to his resolution of never again beholding the face of Isabella Carew. But that resolution, taken in jealous anger and still un-

wavering when he expressed it to his sister, was not proof against the alluring sweetness—the almost caressing language of a note he received a few days later from Moreleigh Abbey, in which the lady of that stately mansion complained of solitude, albeit surrounded by a party formed out of "her Florence set" now vegetating in England, and asked "if her favorite pupil and page would deem it too selfish in her to wish for the speedy return of him whose office she could and would transfer to none; whose services she must, therefore, miss till he was free to render them again to one whose gratitude kept pace with her eager desire for sympathy and friendship." There was no expression of reproach or wonder at his nocturnal flight; but a deep-seated longing for his presence seemed to inspire every phrase. The word "gratitude" was a new one as referring to her own feelings towards him; and, with it, a new hope, albeit sorely alloyed, sprang up in the youth's heart. That hope overturned his resolution to shun her whom he now believed to have degraded herself and deceived him; her summons was instantly obeyed; and, once again in her presence, treated, too, with a flattering confidentialness beyond what he had yet experienced, vanity prompted the question "whether he were not a slave to injurious suspicion in attaching too much importance to the trifling fact of the matching pocket-books?" It was difficult to account satisfactorily for the "Pegno d'amore;" but he told himself that as unfavorable circumstances had ere now received full and fair explanation, and though he had, at Wyngate,

often boldly determined "if he ever did see Isabella Carew again, to ask her in plain terms why she and Langton were foes, when they had been friends," it is certain that at Moreleigh Abbey the dread of irreconcileably offending her, effectually hindered his ever daring even to approach the subject. She avowed a strong antipathy to his brother-in-law, which he sometimes thought he could account for in one way, sometimes in another, without reaching any abiding conclusion; and at all events, it was much pleasanter to employ his thoughts with the day-dreams of delight in which he was gradually lulled, as well by her present graciousness as by the proposal made him of accompanying her and her husband on their travels in the South of Europe. This plan was pressed upon him not only by Lady Carew, but by Sir Edward, who, strong in the old belief that no presumptuous knight would ever attempt a fortress guarded by a champion of such renown as himself, was not likely to be disturbed, concerning a youth of barely eighteen, by jealous suspicions which had never visited him with regard to Langton or to Neyrac, or even that false lover of Miss Kerr's, whose assiduities had caused such a disturbance in the Anglo-Florentine world, and had been so severely commented on by his daughter and son-in-law.

If Frederick Desborough's beauty and Frederick Desborough's devotion recommended him to a woman whose habits of exacting vanity rendered an admirer for every day, and every hour, as necessary to her as the air she breathed, there was also a something about him which pleased the

pompous old man, to whose stories, whether relating to the code of honour or that of the kitchen, he alway listened, or pretended to listen. The pliancy of manner, too, and the temporary self-control which, for an object directly interesting his own passions, Fred Desborough could sometimes exercise, had entirely won him his host's favor; and it therefore followed that while the lady whispered "that her life would be desolate indeed without the attendance of her faithful page," her husband encouraged him "to take the present opportunity of enjoying himself, without troubling his head about any objections his family might raise to his leaving England just then." The "objections" the young man anticipated, were chiefly connected with the probable undesirableness, in his uncles' eyes, of his quitting the country at the moment that the affair of his commission was pending; and he was not a little pleased, when one actually presented itself, to find it was in a regiment which he thought they might agree with him in holding to be "not the thing for their nephew." Nor was he disappointed in being able so to sway their vanities as to make them view the matter in the way it suited him; and—as a cornetcy in a "crack regiment" was not likely to turn up for him before the lapse of some months—it followed that, till the occurrence of that event, Fred was, in their opinion, as likely, perhaps more so, to spend his time unobjectionably on the Continent as at home, so that no opposition was made to his "travelling till the winter." They indeed advised his doing so in company of a tutor, or steady friend of *their* choosing;

but on his showing them his total disgust at such a plan, in a letter in which he artfully contrived to let them know that he had not so entirely broken with Charles Begbie (the original promoter of his theatrical propensities) as they had believed, their old dread of his exposing himself in England (if debarred from enjoying the Continent his own way) got the better of everything, and obtained him the desired permission "to join the Carews on their projected tour." Thus furnished with the consent of his guardians, his vexation was great on discovering, when he came to take leave at Wyngate, that his mother, besides her usual lamentations over any plan that involved his crossing the sea, expressed her utter disapproval of his intimacy with Lady Carew, and of his intended tour in her company, in a manner, for her, uncommonly decided. She had, since his last departure from Wyngate, been made too distinctly aware of how much foundation there was for the evil reports circulating concerning the goddess of his idolatry, to doubt their truth any longer; her late favorable impressions of "poor Lady Carew" had been suddenly exchanged for a perfectly opposite feeling, and terror lest Fred should be inveigled into "running away with *that* Isabella Walpole," had taken possession of her soul. All this she poured forth, beseeching him, with more of vehemence than dignity, to stop in a path which must lead him to ruin, and threatening him, if he persisted, with an appeal to his uncles, "who," she said, "would, and could, the moment they came to know the exact circumstances, make him a ward in Chancery, and thereby acquire the power of

hindering his intended tour—ay, even of bringing him back though already gone forth on it."

"It's Oakly has put you up to that, mother!" exclaimed Fred angrily.

Now as Mr. Oakly, easy and good-natured as he was, had generally been the promoter of whatever shadow of discipline was ever put in force upon Fred, the surmise was a natural one; and it was unfortunately equally natural that his wife, in her hurry to exonerate her husband from the charge of having even ventured to *speak* of measures savoring of restraint, hastened to transfer the blame elsewhere.

"You are always saying unkind things of Mr. Oakly, Fred, but you were never more mistaken in your life! I never took up the notion from *him*, but I was writing to your sister about all my anxieties, and in her answer she said . . . "

"Then it comes from Langton! as I might have guessed," cried her son, grinding his teeth with rage. "He would imprison me if he could! but I wouldn't advise you, mother, to let him drive things quite so far with me! you might repent it, and he too!"

"My dear Fred," said his mother, now trembling before the wrath of her spoilt child, "he never thought—I never dreamt of suggesting such a thing. I was only telling you what *might* be done, for a warning; but you are so excited that you don't understand me."

"If it's a warning, mother, it's all very well; and since you have given it, I shall know, if my rights are interfered with, to whom I owe the favor."

Mrs. Oakly, having thus tried in vain to unsay what she had said, then proceeded from reproofs to supplications, which were as much wasted as the denunciations of sorrow and shame she had previously uttered. Fred never had heeded her wish, when it regarded the merest trifle; how much was he likely to consider it when it ran counter to the dictates of the most violent passion that had hitherto possessed his whole being! The mother and son did not absolutely quarrel, because *she* finally asked *his* forgiveness; and as he graciously condescended to grant the requested pardon, they embraced at parting, after which he hurried to meet the Carews in London, whence they started together for Dover. They had meant to speed on to Paris as fast as French travelling then permitted, but on arriving at Boulogne, Sir Edward fancied he had a twinge of the gout; and though that had disappeared, or nearly so, by the following morning, another impediment to their progress arose in the shape of a feverish cold which attacked little Adela with such severity as to render it impossible to move her with safety for two or three days to come. The delay was not very agreeable to Sir Edward, or to Fred Desborough either; but the former found some consolation in discovering that a Mr. de Tourville, one of his Paris cronies, was recruiting himself with the sea-air of Boulogne, in hopes of, through it, regaining the power of eating nearly as much as Vitellius or Heliogabalus. There would have been more chance of this much to be desired restoration, had the gentleman submitted to anything like the "Diète absolue," which would infallibly have been his treatment in one of

the wards of a French hospital; but his lack of even that degree of self-restraint needful for future enjoyment was—however detrimental to himself—advantageous to Sir Edward, and—in the indirect way of keeping *him* in good humor—to Lady Carew. For Fred Desborough no corresponding consolation presented itself; and though each hour, as it passed over him, fed his intoxicating hope of having at length awakened in the breast of the "Queen of his Soul" a feeling which was rapidly changing from pity into answering love, the interruptions occasioned by little Adela's illness constantly interfered with and disturbed the kind of "servitude" which was his only pleasure. When so disturbed, he had few resources; and on the third afternoon of his unwilling sojourn in "Le petit Botany Bay," he even lounged out towards the Pier, to while away the time (till Lady Carew was ready to take him a drive into the country), with a view of the various more or less deplorable-looking individuals, who, having issued from their place of torture—*i. e.*, the boat—made their way to the Custom House, with such haste as they could, between the two lines of rope which parted them from the staring and quizzing crowd benevolently assembled on each side. In this crowd Fred Desborough stood listlessly gaxing, when, with an amazement which at first rendered him doubtful of the evidence of his senses, he recognised, among the foremost of the passengers, his brother-in-law!

"Langton!" exclaimed he, in a tone which sufficiently indicated his displeasure, "what has brought you here?"

Oswald started, for, having as much reason to believe Fred was already at Paris, perhaps still farther south, as he on his side had for supposing his brother-in-law to be at the English Lakes, the surprise was mutual. His short reply however, "business of Alexander's," was uttered in a more courteous tone than the question, and he added directly, "I'll tell you about it, if you will go round and meet me there while they haul my bag over." Fred saw no necessity for affecting cordiality; nevertheless he did meet Oswald at the door of that Purgatory of travellers, where what small amount of luggage he was encumbered with was going through the usual operations ere it was finally handed over to a "commissionaire," to be conveyed to the "Hôtel de Londres." While these matters were still settling, Fred asked Langton bluntly, "what on earth he had done with Kate?" and on hearing she was at Shadworth, observed, in a significant manner, "that he had thought she and Oswald had set their hearts on staying much longer at the Lakes; he had been told so at least."

"So you were, and so we had," answered his brother-in-law, "for it was an altogether unexpected necessity that broke up our plans. But how come *you* to be here? I fancied you much farther on! Has the right commission in the right regiment turned up for you, after all? and are you going home to-night?"

"Not I—I have heard nothing of a commission—don't care whether I do or no! and I'm certainly not going to cross the water to-night, nor to-morrow neither!"

"Well, I'm sorry to be mistaken," said Langton.

"I don't see how it should concern you, one way or other," said Fred sharply, "unless, indeed —unless . . ."

He paused, and his brother-in-law, by whose side he had now walked out of the Custom House, repeated as he went on, "*Unless*, Fred! unless *what?*"

"Unless you had some reason that—but I think you said you had come here along of Alexander—and . . ."

"I *am* come about affairs of his, which I wish I may be able to settle. But have you been here ever since leaving England, Fred?"

"Yes, I have; I expect to get away to-morrow though—but . . ."

Before he could explain, however, an open carriage drew up sharply from behind them, and as it stopped, the lady within it said playfully:

"Another time, Fred, I shan't follow you, only . . ."

There was here an abrupt pause, for the lady, who was no other than the fair Isabella Carew, now caught sight of Fred's companion, and their eyes suddenly met with an expression which must have struck Desborough, even supposing him free from all previous suspicion. On her part, a start of painful surprise, succeeded by a doubtful look of one second, was exchanged, with a wonderfully rapid exertion of presence of mind, for a bright smile and courteous extension of the hand; while Langton, after mechanically touching it, seemed for a moment so stiffened by deadly

embarrassment, as to find more difficulty in answering, than she in framing, the kind of civil common-places which custom obliges a lady to address to an intimate acquaintance who has just married her intimate friend. She would undoubtedly, had she met him alone, have spared herself the torture of this piece of acting; but Fred's presence obliged her, as it equally obliged Oswald, to behave as if they were, what they professed to be—outwardly—"very good friends when they met." There was no allusion to the rejected invitation; neither was there any tinge of sarcasm or irony in Lady Carew's expressions of regret, when Langton, now restored to composure of countenance, mentioned the "unexpected business" which had compelled him to hurry from the Lakes, and leave Kate for a few days at his father's, while he sought out his brother Alexander. This colloquy, which to Fred seemed endless, lasted in fact just the time, embraced just the amount of subjects, that would have been natural supposing the position of the parties to be precisely that which appeared on the face of things. It was terminated by Lady Carew's saying to Desborough, in a manner which, perfectly good-humored as it was, scarcely admitted of a reply:

"I shan't take you with me now, Fred; you and Mr. Langton must have a great deal to say to each other; and since you have found a friend, a walk's better for you than a drive."

So saying, she gave her orders to the coachman and drove off, nodding gaily to the two men, who walked on some steps without speaking, Langton's cheeks and brow gradually losing the deep flush

which had temporarily suffused them, Fred's mind combining, with the literal "speed of thought," all that might be deduced from the demeanor of the pair he had been watching.

"He has balked me of what I had been looking forward to all day!" said he to himself, as he inwardly wondered whether the disappointment he so acutely felt could be attributed to a prudent regard for appearances *alone;* and he continued his speculations in silence, till, turning quickly to his companion, he asked, in a hoarse, angry tone, "why he had seemed so taken aback just now? did he not know he should find her at Boulogne?"

"Why," replied Oswald, "I had guessed as much within the last quarter of an hour; up to then, I had no more notion of it than I had this time the day before yesterday of being here myself. She is not going to pass the Summer in Boulogne, is she?"

"Oh no; that would be as bad as England—worse in some ways; but her little girl has had a cold, or a feverish attack, or something, and she thought it best to keep on here a day or two at the Hôtel des Bains; but I hope and believe we shall be allowed to start to-morrow, for they don't think it will harm the child now in this fine weather."

"And you are in the Hôtel des Bains too, Fred?"

"Yes—why shouldn't I?"

"For no reason that you don't know as well as I do," replied Langton gravely but quietly.

"Ah, I understand—you would rather I walked off!"

"I believe all your friends would," returned his brother-in-law.

"My friends," cried Fred Desborough scornfully—"if you mean my mother and Mr. Oakly—wouldn't have taken such fancies into their brains, if it were not for your insinuations!"

"I have insinuated nothing to them," answered Langton; "but I can't talk this business out with you at present, Fred, as I must get taken in one of these vehicles to the Rue de l'Ecu, and then start off in quest of Alexander, whom I trust I may soon discover; for you may believe," continued he, as he settled himself and his baggage in one of the various little conveyances assembled before the Custom House, "I should hardly have come to this place for my pleasure."

"Of course not, with Kate at Shadworth!" observed Desborough ironically. "And you had never seen Lady Carew since you were in Paris last year?"

"Never," answered Langton. "So now you know my direction, Fred, in case you like to come and see me before you start to-morrow. Good-bye!" and leaving Desborough among the crowd of idlers, he was driven off into the town, where, after having deposited his carpet-bag at the Hôtel de Londres, he proceeded to various other places of temporary abode for travellers, both in the "Rue de l'Ecu" and elsewhere, at which he inquired in vain for Alexander. He next endeavoured to learn whether any person of the name of Langton had either presented or obtained a passport in Boulogne within the last ten days, but was answered in the negative; and though

this was no precise proof of his not being, or not having been in the town, he began to believe his brother must have gone elsewhere, and thought accordingly of trying the chance of finding him at Brussels. Before acting upon this conjecture however, a description, given him by one of the servants at the Hôtel de Londres itself, of a young man who had been in that very house a few days back (though not under the name of Langton), again threw him into indecision, and he had not yet determined what course to pursue, when he received a note, in a well-known hand, the contents of which put a stop to his wandering farther at a venture. It was thus expressed :—

"I hear from Fred Desborough that you have come over without exactly knowing where to seek for the brother on whose account you are taking so much trouble; and, lest you should lose more time than can be helped, I cannot resist sending you this line to refer you to Major Swinburne, who mentioned him at dinner with us to-day, and will call on you to-morrow morning to give you the tidings you require. I heartily wish you success in what you have so unselfishly undertaken! For in spite of some hasty words, repented of as soon as spoken, and, happily, productive of no injury, you will ever find friendship in the heart of

"ISABELLA CAREW."

Oswald Langton could not but be glad to gain, by whatever means, the likelihood of speedily obtaining knowledge so important; nevertheless,

there was scarcely an incident that could, in itself, have been more thoroughly disagreeable than one which put him under even the shadow of an obligation to Lady Carew. There was something, too, in the form and manner of this communication (which, if she had not *chosen* to undertake it herself, might as well have been deputed to Fred Desborough) that denoted a settled intent to display a kind of friendship most especially odious to him. Odious or not, however, he was bound to acknowledge it; and if he would not inflict on himself the punishment of writing her a letter to follow her to Paris, or that of paying her a visit next morning before she started, he must acknowledge it immediately. He sat down therefore at once to the composition of a note, in which he thanked her politely, but in as few words as courtesy permitted, for the information given; and having done so, carried it himself without delay to the Hôtel des Bains, where he saw it delivered to one of the Carews' servants.

CHAPTER XVIII.

From the moment of his parting from his bride at Shadworth, to that of his return, at past eleven at night, to his apartment in the Hôtel de Londres, Oswald Langton had existed in such a state of ceaseless striving to reach this point, to get through that business, there had been so little stop or stay in his exertions of body and mind for the attainment of his chief aim, as almost to preclude reflection, except with regard to the actual details connected with its object. It was otherwise in the solitude of his own chamber, when action of every kind was necessarily suspended; and there was now added to the regrets, the recollections and the forebodings, which the hurry of his journey had temporarily deadened, a feeling of indescribable horror at having been again forced to see—to greet—nay, to exchange friendly words and to shake hands with her he looked on as "his evil genius!" "His evil genius!" Had he a right so to call her? *Could* she have been so to him save through his own fault? Would she have become, by the age of twenty-four, that corrupting, as well as corrupted being which her obviously deliberate enslaving of Fred Desborough proved her to be,

had not her vanity and lack of principle been previously taken advantage of by one who ought to have known—who *did* know—whither the responding to her coquetry must lead both? If *she* were at that moment looking back on her past life, reflecting on its errors, was it not most certain that she would trace them all—would, at least, trace the irremediable degradation into which she had sunk—to *her* evil genius? And who should say that such a complaint—that such an accusation was unjust? True, she had been always false and selfish; true, she had shown, by the rapidity with which she had transferred her favors, first to Neyrac and then to another, that there was more of headlong levity than of affection in her passion for himself; still those considerations could not suffice to calm his uneasy conscience; for that inward sense is never so keen, so tenderly alive to every prick, as when we are dispirited through the cessation of bliss we acknowledge as undeserved. And undeserved bliss did Langton acknowledge his three weeks on Windermere to have been. Should he ever enjoy the like again? Had he not, as his prophetic soul had told him, indeed left happiness behind him in that cottage on the lake? What business had he with happiness? He who had, by his own act and deed, placed himself, not two years back, in a situation where a chance discovery—an accident over which he could have no control—might (if it had failed to put a violent end to his own existence) have virtually compelled him to offer his protection for life to one, his public connection with whom would have cut him off from all true fellowship

with those he most loved and valued. That it had not been so he devoutly thanked Heaven; but it was humiliating to reflect that he owed entirely to what is commonly called "good luck," his not being then and there in a situation as discreditable and more irretrievable than that out of which he was proceeding, in quality of the man of most weight and steadiest character in the family, to rescue his younger brother! Yet through all the causes of self-reproach that rose in thick array to beset him, he remembered—could not but remember—that it was in Paris he met Katherine; and that Katherine (whom he would not put himself in the way of knowing nearer home) would never have been invited to Paris, save in consequence of those very circumstances which he justly looked back on with the deepest abhorrence! He had not always done so; but at that time there was little danger of his seeing in too mild a light those events whose indirect workings had so grievously alloyed—so nearly perilled his happiness. He was rather prone to draw presentiments of additional sorrow and misfortune from the recollection of how and where he had lighted on the bright and pure gem whose rays had flashed out on him from amid the surrounding dross; to ask himself whether, though permitted to gather the stainless flower he had discovered in his wanderings through a polluted garden, he should not yet, after all, have a penalty to pay for his lawless entrance into the forbidden precinct. "I have said," pursued he inwardly, "that neither for fear nor for repentance would I stop in my course; that till I had won the battle, I would not

sit down to count up all the errors by which I should have lost it. I have won that battle; and now, looking back on all that might have paralysed my strength to fight, I am pursued, haunted, harassed, night and day, by thoughts which . . . but it is useless and cowardly to yield to enemies which are after all shadowy ones! I have repented —I do repent—of heavy sins past; but of winning Kate, come what come may, I repent not." And he sat down thereupon to write her a letter, in which he poured forth, in full and living words, that "weariness of absence" which weighed on him, though without permitting himself to give farther vent to feelings which, he knew, might in a degree infect her to whom they were described. For the same cause he made no comment on his meeting with Fred or with Lady Carew; only stating the facts, and adding "that they were to start next day for Paris." Having finished this letter, he went out with it, at considerably past midnight, in order so to dispose of it as to make sure of its being conveyed by that morning's earliest steamer. He hoped, also, that the short walk in the night air might cool his blood, and procure him some of that inclination to sleep which even the fatigue of two days and nights' incessant travelling and business had failed to bring upon him. He returned, however, as wakeful as before; and, in despair of finding rest, he again sat down to address his father, to whom he began giving a somewhat detailed account of his business transactions in London. But this time weariness overcame him in earnest; by degrees he rested his head on his hand as he wrote, presently the

pen escaped his fingers, he leaned back in his chair to think, with closed eyes, how he should word his next sentence, and sleep, at length, sealed them in a sound and deep repose, which lasted till the ringing of bells and other noises of a well-filled hotel in the early morning, waked him up. An elastic bodily frame and constitutional patience of fatigue enabled him, nevertheless, to receive from these few hours of slumber in a chair that was not even an "easy" one, more refreshment than might have been expected; and though he looked forward with no small anxiety to his interview with Major Swinburne, he had, at any rate, so far got rid of his despondency as to feel braced and ready for a disagreeable day's work. His patience, moreover, was not put to a long trial, for he had scarcely finished a very early breakfast when his expected visitor was announced. From him he heard (not greatly to his surprise) that Alexander was, and had been for the last two days, a denizen of that public building which takes in "all sorts and conditions of men," and to which is given in Boulogne the only too appropriate denomination of "L'Hôtel d'Angleterre." Swinburne was not personally acquainted with young Langton; but had heard of him through a cousin of his whose family resided at Boulogne, and who had himself known Alexander at Oxford. By this cousin, Swinburne had been told of his arrest at the suit of another Englishman, a sojourner in Boulogne, who had lent him money on his arrival, and quarrelling with him afterwards about a bet, revenged himself by taking advantage of the power he had over him, to put him in prison.

"The fellow is an unmitigated rascal and blackleg, though he can pass muster as far as outside goes," said Swinburne. "My cousin was not at all suprised at his conduct; and indeed wished to be of use to your brother, whom he looked on as shamefully treated, but it was not in his power to serve him in the only effectual way. I see, however, that the young fellow is lucky in having good friends; but he will be in a fresh scrape directly, if you don't manage at once to get him out of the set I have seen him going about with here. There's one among them, in particular, who is sure to fleece whatever comes near him, that is not quite so practised a hand as himself."

Major Swinburne completed his kindness by giving Langton a good deal of information valuable for the matter in hand, frankly stating that he had acquired it from being himself engaged in a piece of business as disagreeable, or nearly so, as that which was about to employ his new acquaintance, of whom he would not take leave till he had made him promise to apply to him again if he found himself in any difficulty. This visit over, and the half written letter to his father finished and taken to the post, Langton found that there still remained some time to be got rid of before the hour when he could be admitted, that day, to the sight and speech of a prisoner. In order, therefore, to pass the intervening space, and shun the chance, if he returned to the hotel, of possibly witnessing the Carews' start for Paris (perhaps, too, with a view of being in good earnest "not at home," should Fred think fit to call on him before setting out), he turned his steps towards the Haute Ville, whence,

as he looked down from the Ramparts to the sea, he cast on it a glance of unspeakable longing, which was yet but a faint outward token of the wild eagerness, the restless impatience to return, which, even thus early in his expedition, was all but uncontrollable. When might he hope—after the lapse of how many weary days, might he expect to cross that Channel, again to speed back to her for whom his love and reverence were even greater than before she had become his own ; whose absence he felt, not merely as a severance from the being in whom all his delight was centred, but as a temporary loss of his guardian angel? When, indeed! "When Alexander's affairs are settled, whatever time they may take!" was the answer to his heart from his brain, which thereupon busied itself with a whole train of conjectures of no enlivening nature. Would Alexander be willing, even now, to tell the whole truth about his debts? Would he resign himself to make the promises required of him as conditions of his embarrassments being relieved? And lastly, could any reliance be rationally put on promises, given probably with the intention of keeping them, but without any previous habit of self-control to ensure their observance? It was unpleasant to feel distrustful of one so near him in blood; unpleasant to feel uncertain as to the ultimate use of the sacrifices his first feeling had impelled him to make. "How comes it," said he to himself, "that Alexander is so different from all the rest of us?" "But *was* he so very different?" was the question shortly prompted by that internal monitor which, now no longer slighted or smothered, daily presented to

Oswald Langton a clearer view of himself. "*Was* Alexander so very different?" His tastes were indeed of a kind more apt to lead at once to worldly ruin than were those of his more prudent, and perhaps, in some senses, more refined elder brother; but were these last, in fact, more innocent? True, Alexander was utterly careless of appearances; true, he was indifferent to the opinion of good society; but Oswald was obliged to confess to himself that if one's standard of right and wrong was to depend upon "the opinion of the world," it was only natural to adopt the views of the "world" one chances to be thrown with; and Alexander's "world," if not precisely professing to regard gaming, betting, drinking, and every possible extravagance, as actual virtues, certainly looked on such things as marks of spirit, and as making up the existence of pretty nearly every man "fit to speak to."

"The whole system is false!" said Oswald to himself, as he proceeded with his unsatisfactory contemplation of the code established in his father's house. "And Cecy was right when she used to say there was no good in merely thinking of what would or would not disgrace one as a gentleman, seeing that there is no law, save that of the Christian, which does not vary from set to set, from generation to generation; and that that which is accounted foul in Persia is not unfrequently held fair in Media."

Oswald had been wont to comfort himself with the reflection that he had never knowingly or positively shown Alexander a bad example; but when looking back with a strictly searching eye

upon the past, it was impossible not to acknowledge that his own acquiescence in the worldly-wise laws of expediency, honor, prudence, etc., as the rules of life, could never have contributed to raise another's standard; and that a sort of shyness, produced by the consciousness of secret deviations from the straight path, had frequently withheld him from giving, in season, as pointed and as impressive warnings as he might, to a brother ten years behind him in age and experience. He had passed, he knew, according to the easy judgment of his father and of the world, for a "good son and a good brother;" but how could any man be really such who had practically consented to the treacherous doctrine, that the necessity of self-denial depended absolutely on the amount of injury which a neglect of the same might inflict on others, irrespectively of the duty of obedience to the laws given out to us? He walked leisurely to and fro while engaged in these humbling self-examinations, and in the farther reflection that the best, the only reparation at present in his power, was to deal patiently with Alexander; abstaining, on the one hand, from all expressions of contempt, and resolving, on the other, not to allow fear of the imputation of narrow-mindedness or illiberality to check his avowal of opinions which he himself, a year back, would have thought unreasonably strict. He determined, moreover, not to let himself be tempted to return before the thorough accomplishment of his object, not to allow his wishes to persuade him that Alexander might be safely left to finish matters there where such companions were at hand; and his meditations on

things past and present would probably have lasted longer, had he not been roused from them by hearing his name called by a thick, husky voice, at the sound of which he turned round, to behold, with indescribable vexation, the short square figure and red face of Sir Edward Carew, whom he had believed to be by this time on his way to Paris!

"Glad to see you, Langton," cried he, shaking hands with him. "Heard last night of your being one of the new arrivals. You have made a short honeymoon of it, rather! but everything must have its end; and I'm happy to find you took my advice about our young friend, after all! Better late than never! She's a fine girl, and a most suitable match; I congratulate you with all my heart. You will not have to repent following good advice!"

Langton responded to these speeches as well as a surpassing sense of provocation would allow him, and then observed "that he had understood that Sir Edward and his whole party were to leave Boulogne that morning;" to which remark the old gentleman replied that "that had been their plan;" "but," continued he, "little Adela, who has been ailing ever since we left England, surprised us all by coming out with the measles, just as Lady Carew was returning from her drive yesterday; so, as we didn't get on to Paris while she could have travelled without any great risk, we shall have to stay here I don't know how long! Lady Carew and I both heartily agree in hating Boulogne, but that of course is nothing where health is concerned. Not that there is the least cause of alarm, we are assured (provided we do but wait for the

little lady's convalescence); and we must resign ourselves, I suppose, to being stationary for ten days or so."

Such was the extremity of Langton's disappointment at this intelligence, that he had the greatest difficulty in uttering the suitable replies, after accomplishing which he would have at once directed his steps to the Lower Town, leaving Sir Edward to his constitutional on the Ramparts; but he was not allowed to escape so soon, for he was informed that "Mr. de" this and "Madame de" the other, who had formed part of the Paris society he had mingled in a year and a half back, were enjoying sea air at Boulogne, as well as two or three English, "who were not to be confounded with the common herd there."

"And," continued Sir Edward, "there's the Comte de Tourville, giving as perfect breakfasts here as he used in Paris! I am engaged to him this morning, and to be there at eleven punct, so am taking my walk preparatorily. But couldn't you dine with us to-day, Langton? our hour is seven; they give us good dinners at the 'Bains;' Lady Carew will be delighted if you will come, and you'll meet young Desborough."

To this invitation, garnished as it was by circumstances so singularly tempting, Langton replied that it was unfortunately out of his power to avail himself of any friend's hospitality, as his hours in Boulogne were already appropriated, and he was there entirely for an object of business, to which he was obliged to refer all his movements. He moreover hoped, he said, should the issue of an appointment he must now hasten to keep, prove

favorable, to make arrangements that might lead to his getting very soon back to England, whither he was in a great hurry to return."

"Of course; most natural," rejoined Sir Edward; "only as long as a man does stay in a place he must have his dinner somewhere; so—if you are really prevented to day, but yet don't despatch your business quite as soon as you expect—we shall hope for your company to-morrow."

Oswald answered, "that he was most kind; but feared all his moments would be so taken up, he could not venture to engage himself."

Having thus got rid of the embarrassing politeness of one whose company was in every possible sense odious to him, he turned his back on the old "gourmand," who continued for some time to pace up and down in quest of an appetite for Mr. de Tourville's breakfast, and hastened to that place of compulsory sojourn, of which his brother was an inmate. His interview with him could not be a pleasant one, and was, in some respects, even more unsatisfactory than he had made up his mind that it must be; for Alexander, albeit ashamed and dispirited, seemed at first rather sullen than humbled; and though he muttered an expression of thanks to Oswald "for going out of his way just then to see after *him*," it was plain that he at the moment felt more annoyance at being discovered, and seen in the dismal plight to which he had brought himself, than comfort at beholding the friendly face of the brother who had traversed land and sea to help and rescue him. He brightened up, indeed, when he heard what was proposed to be done for him; but on learning the conditions

thereto annexed, *i. e.* promising to give up cards, to shun the company of habitual card-players, betters, etc., he complained "that it was a mere pretence to say you gave a man his liberty, if you fettered him for life with such illiberal, distrustful terms." "He was aware he had done wrong; was ready to turn over a new leaf, but not to bind himself so absurdly, so slavishly! A man wasn't necessarily a drunkard because he wouldn't take Father Mathew's pledge, nor a gambler because he sat down to a rubber now and then, and wouldn't turn his back on his best friends." It was observed to him "that he must at all events, as he was going to India, give up the society of his companions in England;" but this remark only served to open up fresh grounds for lamentation, and Alexander professed his inability to understand "why *he* was singled out from his family for expatriation," a theme on which he dilated with more volubility than clearness, till his brother, having heard him out, simply referred the fact to his having been unable to keep within the allowance which had sufficed for the other members of the family, and reminded him that he had (not many weeks back) allowed there was nothing better for him. He confessed he had said so, had thought so for a while; but then afterwards the notion of leaving his country had had such an effect upon his spirits, as to "drive him" in sheer desperation, to the high play and other excesses, which had at last brought him to his present condition. "He couldn't help it; he should have gone mad else; if his family really meant kindly by him, as he supposed they did, why should they insist on his going out to

Madras, since that wouldn't lessen the sum they were to pay by one penny?"

Oswald made little answer, and attempted no argument; but he kept his temper, saying nothing calculated to irritate or embitter; and finally (conjecturing that there would be more hope of Alexander's seeing things in a rational point of view, when he no longer looked on the engagements required of him as a price set on his personal liberty), he resolved to do immediately everything for that end, in the first place, and say no more about conditions or the cadetship, till he had his brother in his own room in the hotel, where he trusted that the atmosphere might be more favourable to calm consideration and to a reviving sense of duty. Upon this resolution he acted the more readily, from a near perception of the kind of persons with whom Alexander evidently associated in his present abode, and particularly by the appearance there, as his visitor, of that very individual (calling himself Capt. Watson) against whom Swinburne had especially warned him. It was therefore agreed that Oswald, after despatching the necessary business for the prisoner's release, should return to his hotel, and there make arrangements for the reception of Alexander, who was to follow, when liberated, with such of his effects as he had carried with him into the dwelling he had tenanted for the last three days.

At no great distance from that dwelling Oswald Langton was glad to encounter Major Swinburne, whose kind proffers of service, that morning, enabled him to ask for the benefit of his experience in the matter he at present wished to expedite. And more

rapidly by far was the business concluded than it would have been without the help of his new friend, whose knowledge of the French law respecting debtor and creditor, and of the best and most effectual manner of dealing with "les autorités" great and small, was thankfully appreciated by Langton. He discovered, in the course of going hither and thither, that Major Swinburne was a distant relation of Mr. Scudamore (Sir Edward's son-in-law), and only slightly acquainted with the Carews, concerning whom he made no other observation than that the Lady was very fascinating, and that the gentleman's peculiar connaisseur-ship made one always sure of a good dinner where he presided. It appeared also, that the "disagreeable business," to which he had alluded earlier in the day, and which had already detained him a fortnight in Boulogne, was connected with the affairs of a Captain O' Hara (the husband of a deceased sister), now a tenant of the "Hôtel d'Angleterre," through which circumstance, the Swinburne family hoped to be able to induce him to resign his neglected, and sometimes starving children to the care of their mother's relations. How soon this would be accomplished, and after what space of time Captain O' Hara's "parental feelings" would yield to the desire of being at large again, Major Swinburne could no more conjecture than could Oswald foresee when Alexander would become reasonable; but each sympathised with the other as to the miseries of delay, and the weariness of existence in Boulogne.

When all was done that could be done that day, that is, when all impediments to Alexander's free-

agency had been removed, Swinburne bid adieu to Langton, who, as he bent his steps towards his temporary home in the "Rue de l'Ecu," ruefully considerd that "if that silly boy went on cavilling at every word that was said to him, instead of agreeing to conditions at once, there would be no end of time wasted!'

CHAPTER XIX.

OSWALD LANGTON was not the only person provoked and disappointed by Miss Adela Carew's choosing that precise time and place to sicken with the measles, for Fred Desborough cursed the child in his heart, when he found—after quitting Langton near the Custom House, and returning to the "Hôtel des Bains,"—that there was no hope of "getting on" for a week or ten days certainly, perhaps not for a fortnight to come! It seemed as if there was to be no end to his vexations! He had missed his drive with Lady Carew, which was all "Langton's fault;" he had come in only to hear of the dead stop in the journey from which he expected so much pleasure of every kind; and before he had half recovered from this last blow, he was doomed to learn, at table, Sir Edward's hospitable intentions "of having Langton to dinner with them as long as he staid in Boulogne;" as also to find that his ready offer to carry the message about Swinburne to his brother-in-law, was declined by her ladyship, for apparently no better reason than that she *preferred* writing to him herself. Why should she prefer it? The fiend, into whose power Frederick Desborough had flung himself—the demon of ungratified love and

jealousy—answered him as fiends are wont to answer; and there arose forthwith in his unhinged and darkened—though subtle and acute—mind, a fancy that could only have sprung up therein under the influence of the kind of madness which was hourly gaining upon him—the fancy, namely, that, in spite of their supposed quarrel, and seemingly mutual dislike, Oswald Langton and Lady Carew possessed some secret means of knowing of each other's movements, and that there was consequently less of chance in their meeting of that day than—as he was obliged to confess to himself—the demeanor of both tended to show. Fred had not been previously so utterly blinded by prejudice as to believe (though he sometimes professed such a belief) that Oswald had sought his sister in marriage from considerations of interest *alone*. He had allowed, in unwilling acknowledgment of what his own eyes and understanding told him, that he was "as much in love with Kate as so cold-blooded a fellow could be;" nor had anything now occurred which should have interfered with that impression in the mind of a rational creature. But Fred was no longer a rational creature; and he was so biassed by the delusive idea, not uncommon among lovers, that the being most attractive to him was necessarily the most attractive to every man, as to be disposed to accept almost any solution for the difficulties that stood in the way of the hypothesis he had—in a vague manner indeed, and at intervals—begun to adopt. This nightmare of his imagination soon resulted in the changing and sharpening of his *retrospective* jealousy of Langton into a

present and actual jealousy—into a dread of the positive and speedy renewal of the tie which, he now felt more sure than ever, had once closely bound him and Isabella Carew. When a gleam of reason visited his bewildered soul, he became temporarily sensible of the folly and baselessness of his suspicion (as regarded the present); he would fain have proved his own mistake to himself, and it was partly in this hope that he was impelled, about the middle of the day after Langton's arrival, to call on him at his hotel, where he meant to draw from him, in conversation, all he could concerning his plans and motives in coming to Boulogne, in order thus to judge if his professions were borne out by his actions, and his account of them worthy to be relied on. He was scarcely in a mood to weigh any such evidence with tolerable impartiality; for his fear predominated over his hope, while his own deep and early corruption led him to expect evil rather than good from all around him. Nevertheless it was a disappointment to him to hear "that Mr. Langton was not at home;" and he was sauntering out into the street, with a sufficiently gloomy countenance, when Oswald almost stumbled against him in the doorway. There was not much courtesy in the tone in which Fred Desborough explained that he had come there with the intention of calling on him; he however turned round, and accompanying his brother-in-law, said, as he entered his apartment:

"I suppose now you have seen Alexander, and, I conclude, done the needful to get him out, you will be off again?"

"I can't quite do that—wish I could!" replied Oswald; "but I hear you, or your party rather, are detained here for an indefinite time!"

"How do you know that?" asked Fred, hastily.

"From Sir Edward, whom I came across this morning; he asked me to dinner; but I told him I could not be sure of myself for any particular time, so of course I declined."

"He said yesterday he should ask you," muttered Fred, looking down; "but you have declined, you say?"

"Yes; I have neither time nor inclination for company or visiting, as I expect Alexander before long, and shall have enough to do all this evening in getting from him written particulars of the claims upon him; we might have got a good way in that already, if he would have been reasonable at once. After he has grown cooler though, he will agree, I doubt not, to the conditions proposed to him; when he has done that, I shall see my way, and in a few days we shall go home together."

"Conditions!" said Fred, musingly; "what do you precisely mean by conditions?"

His brother-in-law explained; and, in order to his better comprehension, abridged, for his benefit, part of the conversation he had just had with Alexander; whereupon Fred shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Of course you have a right to make your own demands; but, though I have little sympathy myself with some of Alexander's tastes, and some of Alexander's new friends, I think it may bear a question whether a man of spirit can allow himself

to be so shackled! Still, you think he'll give in, as no doubt it's best he should; only you perceive that if he does, it will be through his own sense of what is good for him; so why you should keep on here, mounting guard over him, when you are so anxious to be back at Shadworth, I can't see. You have got him out of prison, the rest can all be settled in writing; so it seems to me that, if you have no other business in Boulogne than Alexander's, you might cross over by the first boat!"

"I shall have enough of his to keep me here something longer, I'm afraid," replied Langton, who proceeded to give Fred a more distinct idea of what was necessary to be accomplished before Alexander could safely show himself in England, than he had appeared to entertain.

"That's all very well," returned Desborough; "but you are not obliged to stay here yourself to *see* it done!"

"Not if Alexander were entirely to be—not if he had any strength of character, I mean; but you know it is otherwise; and if I left him here in the mood he is in, with some money in his hands, as I should be obliged to do, I can't tell—with that fellow Watson hanging about him as I am told he does—if what I came here to do mightn't be all undone the minute my back's turned. Besides, my father laid great stress, supposing I went at all, on my bringing Alexander back *with* me, if possible."

"If possible!" repeated Fred, rather sarcastically; "well, I don't know if you are right or wrong in mistrusting my friend Alexander so

much; but if you *have* cause to think him so little to be relied on, so unlikely to let himself be helped to purpose, I wonder you should have thought it worth while, being—as is to be supposed—in the enjoyment of what made you perfectly happy, to rush over here, to pick him out of one scrape, when you believe he will forthwith fling himself into another, unless you actually keep him in sight, like a convict! With such an opinion of him, I confess it surprises me you should choose to put yourself so much out of the way."

"I did not consider I had any 'choice,' answered Langton. "If he won't let himself be saved, I can't help it; but I thought it incumbent on me to make the attempt, and Kate thought the same."

"Poor Kate!" ejaculated Fred, in a tone of compassion, "how did she like being left at Shadworth?"

"As much, I should think, as *I* like being here," said Langton, the earnestness of whose look and manner for a moment convinced Fred of the falsehood of the suspicions which, during the last ten minutes, had rather increased than diminished; and the relief he felt at being thus freed awhile from the evil spirits of jealousy and distrust, enabled him to receive with good humor Langton's apologies for being obliged "to send him away," on account of his wish to be alone to receive Alexander, who might now be looked for any minute.

"I understand—I understand," said Fred, rising; "better you should be to yourselves; and I hope Alexander will, as you say, be reasonable, that you

and he may get off together at the earliest moment. I should be too glad of it for his sake and yours, and Kate's—and everyone's. But," added he, returning after half opening the door, "if he makes difficulties, Langton, you surely wouldn't think it necessary to stay here any longer?"

"I can't say exactly; I might see cause for waiting till they were got over," replied Oswald.

"You may stay on for ever, at that rate!" cried Desborough, angrily; "for he might kick at India after all (I daresay I should in his place!)—might boggle at some of the conditions yet; for though circumstances do give you a devilish deal of power, you are not his guardian, and he is no minor! Well for *me* that I knew in time what you were plotting, and took myself off before you had put my uncles up to it!"

Langton stared at this furious speech, not immediately comprehending what was meant; and as he remained silent, Fred added "that he supposed he no more recommended his being made a ward in Chancery than he had represented his intimacy with the Carews as disadvantageous?"

"I am beginning to understand," said Langton, now recollecting the conversation that passed between him and his wife at Ambleside, "for it is true I once asked Kate, who was telling me of her mother's anxieties about you, whether your family had ever thought of using such an expedient. But if your sister, as I conclude she did, mentioned what I had said in writing back to Mrs. Oakly, it was without my knowledge, and, I should think, without a notion of the idea's being acted on."

"That's as may be," cried Fred; "all I know is,

that my mother threatened me with Chancery and restraint the last day I was at Wyngate; and when I asked her if Oakly was at the bottom of such benevolent plans, she denied his having anything to do with them, but soon let out what you confirm, as you confess to having 'mentioned the thing to Kate!'"

"I do confess it, and am no ways ashamed of it," answered Langton; "for though I deny having ever, directly or indirectly, interfered in your concerns since last Autumn, I do *not* deny that if I had been consulted, I should have given the advice you suspect me of having volunteered."

"And how do you suppose I am to regard a man who would—all for my future benefit, of course—have imprisoned me if he could?"

"Not with a friendly eye, so long as you are under the influence of the perverse fit now upon you, I am quite aware."

"Oh, you are aware of that much? So much the better!" cried Fred; "it's open enmity between us!"

"Not on my part," said Oswald.

"Not open?—only underhand?"

"Neither open nor underhand; for I wish you well, Fred; but I do not think the prolonging of our conversation at present likely to do either of our tempers good; when you are cooler I shall be happy to see you again."

He opened the door as he spoke, and the infuriated youth rushed out, leaving his brother-in-law in the belief (which, though mistaken, was not unnatural) that this outbreak had explained the *whole* cause of that extreme displeasure at the sight

of him which Desborough had displayed on the previous day.

"I had seen him angry before, and sulky before," said Langton to himself; "but so strange as he was yesterday I had never beheld him. He looked so odd, and said so many queer things I had no key to; I have it now! Poor Kate made a terrible mistake in repeating my views of what might be done to rule that most unruly young gentleman. She ought to have known her mother better!"

While Langton was thus settling down into the quiet conviction "that he now understood Fred thoroughly" (a condition of mind which is precisely the most unfavorable to the discovery of hidden truths), the reckless being whose motives he believed he had fathomed, wandered hither and thither, more disposed than ever to doubt his brother-in-law's professed wish to go home as soon as possible, and in a state of rage which was rendered the more violent by the disappointment of his endeavours to excite the object of it to a similar pitch of irritation. He was, besides, vexed at having shown Langton so much of the bitterness of his feeling; for he feared lest he might have thereby deprived himself of the means of influencing, or circumventing, one whom he was getting to regard so positively in the light of a rival. Tired at length of strolling aimlessly through the town, he returned to the Carews' hotel; and proceeded to take the first opportunity for relating, in a somewhat sarcastic manner, to the "lady of his thoughts," the substance of his colloquy with his brother-in-law (the first part of it at least.)

She made little comment thereupon, neither joining in the satirical remarks put forth on Langton's preference of "his duty to Alexander over his pleasure with Kate," etc., nor yet taking part on the other side, or appearing in any way to think the matter worth discussing. Similar handles for criticism or ridicule had, as it seemed to Fred, been very differently received at Moreleigh Abbey, and this observation led him to attach the more importance to an indescribable something in her demeanor towards himself the evening before, a sort of departure—slight, no doubt, but perceptible—from that kindness in look and speech, almost verging on tenderness (to which she had now for some weeks accustomed him), which had fanned his hopes, and wellnigh changed them into *expectations* of perfect bliss. Was this alteration of manner accidental, attributable to pre-occupation about little Adela, or—or—was it the token of all he dreaded? A little later, when, on seeing her perhaps somewhat ostentatiously taken up with her little girl's indisposition, he hazarded a remark on her indifference to his sympathy, she cut short his complaints by telling him, in a matter-of-fact way, "that she knew he had the good taste to be very fond of Adela, but that just then Adela's mamma was too busy to listen as much as she ought to the kind things he was saying."

"Good taste indeed!—too busy to listen!—when the child is fast asleep, and only needs being left alone!" said Fred Desborough to himself, when Lady Carew, as she concluded the foregoing reply to his over sensitive expressions, left *him* alone. "She had better look to herself," continued he

inwardly, "for I can bring her to bay yet!" and he pressed his finger on the pair of matching pocket-books which he retained still on his person, as an anchorite retains a hair-shirt, though not precisely on the same principles. "I was a fool not to put them to some use when I first saw her after the wedding! but I am up to more now every way than I was then! It is not too late! and if I find she has just taken me up to put me down again, for reasons she best knows, why, I could show her *that* would make her glad to buy my discretion at such price as I please!" But when his frenzy of irritation subsided, in the course of the evening, under the influence of some sweet smiles vouchsafed him, so likewise did the reckless audacity which had inspired him with the project of forcing her to terms. He therefore hesitated between risking that daring attempt at "making sure," as he mentally called it, or bowing his pride to call once more next day, in a friendly manner, on Oswald, to ascertain what progress was making towards the settling of Alexander's affairs, and to learn whether, after all, his bugbear were not about to go quietly home again. On this last course he decided; and accordingly, on the following afternoon, he strolled out to visit his brother-in-law, whom he found, busy writing, in a room considerably nearer the sky than that in which he had last seen him.

"Langton," said he, as he went in, with that frank air he could always assume, "I was foolish enough to be put out yesterday, and said several things I had better have left alone."

Oswald immediately stretched out his hand,

which Fred was now compelled to grasp, though his soul rebelled against the act, and he despised himself for his hypocrisy.

"Whatever you said or did," continued he, "I am sure it was well-meant, according to your views, so you are to consider by-gones by-gones; and now all's right on that score, tell me what has been the issue of your talk with Alexander! You are hardly going home just yet, I am afraid, judging by the long letter you are inditing!"

"You are right, Fred," said Oswald, sadly; "I *am* delayed, and for even a more indefinite period than I had anticipated; though Alexander *is* better this afternoon."

"Better! why, he wasn't ill yesterday, was he?"

"No, but—though it's no laughing matter to him or to me—I can hardly expect *you* to keep your countenance; for the truth is, when Alexander and one of his companions in misfortune were (as ill luck would have it) liberated at the same time, the first use they made of their freedom was to get up a race between the vehicles that were taking them and their luggage away! The result was an overturn, which, fortunately, occurred not many yards from this door, where Alexander was drawn from beneath the ruins of his chariot, in a condition which caused him to be reported to the waiters here (and to me) as 'raide mort,' though upon nearer inspection he proved to have *only* broken his collar bone, besides receiving sprains and contusions innumerable! I had him taken at once to what was my room on the second floor, which is why you have been shown up rather higher to-day, for *I* am where I had thought myself very lucky

to get a lodging for him (in this crowded house)—and where you would have found him now, if it hadn't been for that confounded fancy of turning the streets of Boulogne into a race course! I believe he is in very good hands (medically speaking), and I am told he will be well in a few days; but in the meantime we are at a complete stand still; and though, to do him justice, poor fellow, I don't think he will hesitate *now* about conditions, he has not hitherto been in a state to be spoken to seriously about anything. So here I am for the present!"

"It's hard on you, hard too on Kate," said Desborough, in a sympathetic tone. "Now couldn't you, Langton, leave me here in charge of my chum Alexander (I would take a room in this hotel till he is about again), and empower Swinburne to represent you in all the business part of the story?"

"Thank you, Fred, I should desire no better as far as my own liking went; and as far as taking my place as nurse, I daresay you are just as fit for it as I. But I can't put Swinburne exactly in my position, even if he consented to take the office; I can't hand over to him my authority with Alexander; and do what he would, I couldn't expect him to be heeded as I can make myself heeded, so long as I am here. It is of consequence (as I said before) that Alexander should not be tempted to receive visits and civilities from men who have only known him in a phase of his existence that brings him too much to their level! When he is among those with whom he has a character to make and to

keep up, I trust it may be very different; but just now it won't do to expose him to fresh trials."

"Then you intend to stay on?" asked Fred in a dissatisfied tone.

"I do; for if my coming was to produce any real good, my stay is necessary; so I must make up my mind to the annoyance."

Fred was silent for some moments, after which he said, rising from his seat:

"Well, I see you won't let me do what would spare you the writing of that letter, so I had best leave you to finish it; and I had very nearly forgotten to say I was the bearer of an invitation for you. May the Carews expect you at dinner to-morrow?"

"No: I told Sir Edward my time, while here, is appropriated; and that applies to one day as much as to another. Besides which, I don't like leaving Alexander for a whole evening."

"He'll hardly let that pass for an excuse after to-morrow. But you are determined not to come?"

"Quite determined; for having, it seems, given offence by not taking Kate to their place in England, I don't wish to accept their hospitality here, apparently for my own convenience."

"Well, according to your view of things, I daresay you are right," returned Desborough, shaking hands with him with a nearer approach to real cordiality than he had felt for many a day. "I may give a look at Alexander on my way down, mayn't I?"

"Not to-day—no; he is still in great pain, and

not up to talking," replied Oswald; "he must see no one just yet."

"Sorry for that," said Fred; "but I suppose you know best; so good-bye."

And he therewith returned to the "Hôtel des Bains," delighted to inform the Carews "that Langton would dine out nowhere while at Boulogne," and as satisfied as his suspicious nature would allow, that his brother-in-law had crossed the seas for no other cause than that he avowed.

"I wonder what he does with himself!" said Sir Edward.

"I believe he is writing home most of the time, when he is not watching Alexander, or grumbling to Swinburne," replied Fred.

"Of course he is bound to send Kate a despatch daily," observed Lady Carew, sarcastically; "and I suppose his not choosing to dine anywhere but at the 'table d'hôte' of the 'Hôtel de Londres' is a promulgation of the fact that he 'takes no pleasure' away from her, queer as his fashion of displaying his allegiance may be; but let him do as he likes, in Heaven's name!"

CHAPTER XX.

LITTLE Adela Carew "went on" (as it is called) most favorably; still she was necessarily in bed for some days; and in the course of this protracted sojourn at the "Hôtel des Bains" time hung heavy on the hands of the party whom her indisposition detained there. Fred Desborough, temporarily freed from the more acute symptoms of his fit of *present* jealousy, made up his mind to regard Adela as the sole cause, and consequently excuse, for her mother's less exclusive attention to himself; but he was, perhaps, on this very account, the more in want of some amusement to fill up the interval of calm; and he was so put to it for some way of getting through the long hours, that he was extremely glad to hear from Oswald Langton, whom he met walking with Major Swinburne, "that Alexander, though not yet out of his room, was so much better that it would perhaps do him good to receive a visit." To Alexander's apartment Fred accordingly betook himself, and found, at least, a hearty welcome from his friend, who, though now nearly recovered from the effects of his bruises and fracture, was weak and sorely dispirited, as well as most desirous of pouring into any listening ear his many and various causes of

woe. He had been unlucky; he had been ill-used; those who meant well by him at bottom misunderstood and distrusted him; and, the worst of all was, that his last provoking mischance (his overturn, to wit) had so retarded matters (by disabling him, for two days, from business explanations with his brother) as to give him a double dose of the odious feeling that he was making both Kate and Oswald miserable. "For," concluded he, "I mind that more than all the rest put together!"

"And you think Oswald *is* miserable here!" said Fred in as careless a tone as he could assume.

"Think! why, you have only to look in his face and see it," rejoined Alexander. "But," continued he, in a half melancholy, half grumbling voice, "it's not the less provoking that he *chooses* to stay on here, punishing himself and me, only because *I* can't go back till we have answers from London, you understand, though he might have gone home two days back if he would have let me accept Watson's kind offer to give me the spare room in the apartment he and Madame d'Alby (his sister, you know) have in the next street; I should have been quite as well taken care of, and a devilish deal more jolly than in this place, not to mention the satisfaction of knowing Oswald was happy again; for he has really done a great deal for me, more than you would think; and it was my telling Watson how wretched it made me to have cut my brother's honeymoon up in this way, that led to his inviting me, in that frank hospitable manner of his, 'ill or well, to make his house my own.' Only Oswald is so prejudiced; it's his one

fault; and I suppose Swinburne has been telling him stories either about poor Watson's distress last year, or else something ill-natured about that kind, unaffected creature, Madame d'Alby; and, situated as I am, I couldn't make fight—so you see!—Now isn't that provoking?"

Fred readily agreed; and, after listening to these and similar lamentations till he was somewhat weary of them, a combination of idleness, curiosity, and remains of suspicious watchfulness impelled him to climb two stories higher, to take his chance of catching his brother-in-law, whom he found busied, apparently, in destroying a note.

"Something from Kate, too sweet to be seen?" asked Fred.

"No, it's only rubbish I'm getting rid of; but I *have* had a letter from Kate, and from my father too. I hope my letter to him, which he must have received yesterday, has relieved his mind a little about the consequences of Alexander's accident. I think, myself, he will be as sound as ever in a few days; so, except his own suffering, poor fellow, and the delay in the settlement of business, I believe there is no great harm done. Kate says she has good reports of all your people at Malvern, and there was something—where is it now?—about Annie's going up the hills before breakfast—"

He took the letter in his hand as he spoke, and carrying it to the window, searched in a crossed corner for the piece of home news for Fred, who, now satisfied that his brother-in-law's eyes and attention were not directed towards *him*, succeeded in examining a small shred of the paper he had found him tearing up. The fragment had but

one word and a half on it, both insignificant enough; but the *hand* was noticeable, being no other than that in which "Pegno d'amore" was traced in Langton's discarded pocket-book! Fred instantly chafed the bit of paper into atoms, after which he sustained with difficulty a conversation of some ten minutes, hearing with his ears, though not with his understanding, the story about Annie and the Malvern Hills, and then listening with the keenest attention to Oswald's version, "most plausibly brought forward," as he considered it, of Watson's invitation to Alexander, and its probable motives. Having compelled himself to exchange with Langton the customary marks of friendly courtesy, he departed, again the prey of revived suspicions, which goaded him into a renewal of that constant observation of every trifling action of Lady Carew, from which he *had* relaxed, and the return to which was perfectly visible to its object.

Nor were his suspicions of her, on this occasion, unfounded; for Langton had, about five minutes before his brother-in-law's visit, found in his room, on returning to it from his walk with Swinburne, a note of which the direction was evidently in a disguised hand. On opening it, he saw at once that Lady Carew was his correspondent, and read the following words: "I entreat of you to change your mind, and let Sir E. know you *can* dine with us, for your continued refusals attract attention; besides which, I *must* speak to you, and if you will not afford me the opportunity here, I must seek you wherever I can find you." The note was neither signed nor dated, but its

authorship was not the less clear to Langton, and great was his uncertainty whether in any manner to acknowledge it or no. He thought for a moment of doing so in an open, above-board fashion, as if he had received an invitation of an ordinary description, to be declined in an ordinary way; but reflecting that such a proceeding might cause Lady Carew great embarrassment, and yet seeing no means of replying secretly, he resolved to leave it absolutely unnoticed. His resolution was confirmed by an impression that, for some indefinable end of spite or vanity, there was a wish for a renewal of intimacy; but though this growing belief strengthened him to abide by his original determination not to set foot in the Carews' apartments, his reflections, when left alone with them by Fred Desborough's departure, were uneasy enough. He paced restlessly and impatiently up and down the room, till, wearied at length, he snatched up his father's letter, and the two he had received from Kate since his arrival, and began to look over them again, though as he did so he observed to himself "that they were not altogether satisfactory." There was something stiff and unlike herself, he fancied, in Kate's last, which seemed too much as if she had "thought it her duty" to say the right things about not leaving Alexander to his bad companions, etc., to be quite natural. "She believes those folks at the Hôtel des Bains are gone," continued he inwardly; "is glad I am 'spared the annoyance of their presence here!' She little dreams of the hell my inevitable purgatory is turned into by their lingering on in this abominable town, where everyone knocks

up against everyone! By this time she must know—know the fact at least—it was no use telling her every odious detail. Then my father, he has heard of Watson, and of Watson's sister (Madame d'Alby, as she calls herself), being here, so is more anxious than ever that, "since I *have* come, I should stay long enough to make it a clean business, and bring Alexander back with me." I had not wavered; but if I had, this would fix my resolutions; to be sure, I don't think we can now be detained many days more. How provoking, too, to find that Cecilia and Lewis are being brought home in this hurry by good Mrs. Tynedale! They must be at Shadworth now, for Kate's postscript says, "we are expecting them in a few hours;" and—in one sense—I can't be sorry, as she will not be so utterly lonely and melancholy with Cecy there; still, they ought not to have been sent for, and I *am* sorry Markham should be made to feel so personally the inconvenience of having Alexander for a brother-in-law."

A knock at his door, and a packet of fresh letters, here interrupted his reflections. Two or three were from London—short and tolerably satisfactory—on matters that concerned Alexander, and one was from Katherine, mentioning the arrival of Cecilia and her husband, adding, that he, finding there was nothing for him to do as regarded Alexander, had gone on to pass a day or two at Ashe Grange, his own house in ——shire, in order (now they were in England) to hasten its being put, as soon as possible, in a fit state for his wife's reception there. Katherine then dwelt on the pleasure of being with Cecilia again; of

seeing her and Lewis so thoroughly happy in each other; spoke too of the satisfaction she knew it would be to him (Oswald) to think of his father as restored to his daughter's care; hoped that the comfort Cecilia had expressed on hearing that *he* had undertaken the business of rescuing Alexander, would help him to bear up against the many difficulties and disagreeables he had to contend with, for as long as he considered it right and useful to do so. But though all this was affectionately, nay, tenderly worded, it bore so little the stamp of the writer's usual warm and rapid flow of feeling, that her husband said again as he had of her former letter, "It's unlike Kate! more unlike even than the last! Seems as if it were written from a copy! What can have come over her?" Whatever it might be, Katherine's letter was not, so to speak, "in tune" either with his own passionate sense of the misery of being divided from her, nor yet with the bitter feeling, now of remorse, and now of irritable resentment, which had pursued him with redoubled violence during every unemployed moment, since he first saw his brother-in-law's face on landing. "I hope Fred has not been telling her I *prefer* being here, as he gives me to understand I do, nearly every time I see him!" said he to himself, as he again cast his eyes on the close of his wife's letter. In his sober senses, however, Oswald believed that (even if his brother-in-law *had* done him that favor) nothing he could do or say would alter Katherine's trust in him; and he knew besides that it was unreasonable to expect from her, at one and the same time, encouragement to do his duty in staying where he

was, and an outpouring of the natural feelings, the expression of which could only render it harder for him to resist his own. He acknowledged, too, that it was difficult for her, on other points, to do more than express general sympathy ; for of Fred's positive and violent quarrel with him (on a subject arising, in truth, out of an indiscretion of her own) he had not himself said a word ; and concerning the Carews, though she did, in a matter-of-course way, mention her regret for the vexatiousness of their prolonged stay in Boulogne, of *them* it was as painful to write as to speak. "There is even a shackle upon my writing to Kate!" said he impatiently. "It is a comfort for each to know that the other is alive and well ; but of the thoughts that fill our hearts most there can be no interchange." As he made this melancholy reflection, his eye was struck by a sheet of paper on the floor, covered with Katherine's handwriting, which had probably fallen out when he unfolded the letter. He picked it up more eagerly than might have been anticipated, considering his small expectation that this supplement, or long postscript, had "anything in it." Whether such were the case or no, he did not instantly ascertain ; since, the first sentence being a broken one, he re-opened the letter itself, to seek for its former half. He could not find it ; she had doubtless fancied she had made the beginning there ; so without troubling himself farther to guess what the precise sense of it might be, Oswald read on and on, with a mixture of strong interest and puzzled surprise, till it at length dawned upon him that what he was perusing was no letter (though it had been accidentally

folded within one), but a stray leaf of a journal, beginning with this half sentence—"very sensible, and, I should suppose, for the most part, very true. But *this* dream was the most frightfully real one I ever had—makes me feel quite afraid of going to sleep to-night, lest it should return! I could only tell Cecy half of it though—could not tell *her* who it was had hold of me, lest she should say again what she said yesterday in joke, when I suppose my face showed something of my horror at finding that Fred and the Carews are still there, must be there for some time longer. Poor Cecy! she little knew the chill that ran through me as she asked so smilingly 'whether I were jealous of Lady Carew?' I hope—I believe—I answered easily—naturally—God knows it was sincerely, for I am *not* jealous. I have Oswald's whole heart, and would answer with my life for his constancy; but though I have sometimes blamed him in my soul for being too severe upon Isabella, I know that to have seen her, to be exposed to the risk of seeing her again, to be obliged to exchange greetings with her husband, to be made daily more and more aware of her degradation, and of the evil course in which my unhappy brother is being confirmed—I know all that makes Oswald wretched! Yet I cannot write to him of these things, cannot tell him how thoroughly I understand them, without perhaps inflicting, by some chance word, more pain than that I would do and suffer anything to soothe. If I were with him, I could *show* him my sympathy; for though he cannot always bear that even, he could not misunderstand me long; but when I cannot see his face, to warn me when I have said

enough, when I am not by him to ask his pardon if I have wounded him, it is impossible. Besides, if I once began to speak of thoughts, of feelings, I should tell him how wretched *I* am, should betray some of the hideous fancies that afflict and terrify me. They are wild, they are groundless—at least I believe so when I am recovering my senses as it were, after being for a while the prey of one of those fits of alarm; but when they are upon me, I can't rid myself of the notion that Isabella will not rest till she has done Oswald an injury! I suppose it was the actual sight, the visible proof she gave me at Wyngate of her fiendish hatred, that has affected my imagination; for the recollection has pursued, has haunted me unceasingly ever since I have learnt how near she is to him! I believe, as Cecilia says (speaking in general), that the dream I can't think of now without shuddering, was the effect of all this, and not, as I almost felt it this morning, a sort of revelation, or warning at least. It is unreasonable to be disturbed by aught so visionary; yet it *will* disturb me, I know, till I have Oswald safe back! If I could only go to him! but I saw I was thought almost insane this morning, when I put forward the idea of it; and Cecilia said directly, that though it would no doubt be a great delight to Oswald in one sense, in others it might be an inconvenience; and then she added, 'that after what had passed about my not being allowed to visit the Carews at Moreleigh Abbey, there would be an exceeding awkwardness and disagreeableness in my being lodged in the same street with one who had been my intimate friend, but was no

longer to be so.' She is quite right—more right than she knows; so, as I had nothing to urge in reply (that I could tell *her* at least), I have given up the notion . . . . Well, I have written my letter to Oswald, without saying a word of all I am really feeling, except that I *do* honestly wish him to do his duty by Alexander to the utmost. How I should reproach myself if I thought I had contributed in the smallest degree to his leaving his work half done! and I know too that the greater the sacrifice, the happier I shall be when he does come home at last! I must look hopefully at the future—but at the present moment, here I am so afraid of going to bed and having another nightmare, that I am even sitting down to 'write to myself!' How I have laughed at other women for chronicling their thoughts in this way! But now I feel as though my senses would desert me, if I did not give that outlet to all that is pent up within me. Cecilia is kind and sympathizing as ever; but Oswald once said 'he knew he could depend on me for never allowing her to suspect the past,' and if God gives me strength to be silent, she never shall! . . . It is only now and then too, at the moments when I am in a manner suffocated with painful thoughts, that I ever feel impelled to utter them, for I would not willingly lower Oswald in her eyes, or inflict on her a sorrow which would be as deep as my own. I see she thinks me weak and self-engrossed to a degree that surprises her; yet she is more indulgent on the subject than I believe I should be: for, *knowing only what she knows*, it must appear little short of madness to be so incapable of resigning myself

patiently to a short absence of my husband, who is not gone on a dangerous expedition, is not at sea, is only at—Boulogne! I must try to seem less absent, more interested in those around me. Grateful for their kindness I am; and oh! how especially grateful for being here—not at home—and that *they* are away at Malvern, too far off to come and wonder I am looking so ill! Mr. Langton is so gentle, and Cecilia so singularly patient and unselfish, that I wish more than ever to retain their love and their good opinion. If I could only receive some assurance that my prayers for Oswald have been heard! If I could only see with my own eyes that no evil beyond those which threaten us all . . . " There was no more; for the sheet ended, as it began, with an unfinished sentence.

Oswald Langton had devoured its contents with greedy haste; he now went over each line anew with an emotion which, as intense if less vehement, permitted him to linger upon the passages that most stirred his heart; and as he a second time reached—not their conclusion—but the point where they broke off, he was overpowered by a mixture of feelings. There was gratitude for the surpassing love of one of whom he daily deemed himself unworthy; self-reproach for the sin that lay at the root of those terrors which so disturbed her mind " that she was afraid to sleep;" resentment against the woman who by betraying her own guilt and his had poisoned his cup of joy—nay, saddened Kate's whole existence; and above all there was such a redoubling of desire to fly home to seek peace and safety in the arms of his bride, as forced him

to strengthen his wavering resolution by repeating again and again "that *she* would despise him if he left his work half done, that *she* was in the right—they would be happier in the end for the present sacrifice." The remorseful fears which Katherine's mental sufferings excited in him made him long to write to Cecilia, for he would fain have entreated her to watch over her more carefully and tenderly than ever; but he reflected that to do so without explanation would be only to subject himself (and perhaps Katherine too) to the imputation of a sort of exacting weakness he would have been ashamed to incur in his sister's and Lewis Markham's eyes. He therefore refrained from making the attempt; trusting, as he knew he well might, to the invariable kindness and warm affection Cecilia had always shown his wife, as well as hoping that the lapse of a very few days must at last end his own state of durance, and send him home, to give and find that comfort which no vicarious devotion could afford. He would give Katherine what relief he could, however; she should no longer say that to her journal alone she might confide the thoughts that oppressed her; and sitting down to answer—not her *letter*, but that stray leaf which had presented him with a fragmentary picture of her mind—he involuntarily traced such a reflection of his own, with its every complication of feeling and passion, as he had little meditated. Whatever had befallen him since his arrival at Boulogne, from his quarrel with Fred to the note he had received an hour back, all was rapidly poured forth; and when he had done so, it seemed to him as if his own heart was lightened,

and as if Katherine, now made acquainted with events as they occurred, would be less the victim of imaginary terrors. He carried his hastily-written letter to the Post; and it was not till his return thence that, on a cooler view of things, he began to doubt whether he had done wisely; and whether (in a position so painful as theirs necessarily was) absolute reserve might not have been better for Kate's peace than allowing her to become aware of the unaccountable endeavors made to attract him to the "Hôtel des Bains." "She has caught some of my old superstition on those points," was his inward reflection; "I shouldn't encourage her in it, nor yet fall back into it myself. And now I must set to work, with might and main, at the answers to those London letters (when Alexander has seen them at least), for they ought to go by the next Post, as they could not be ready for this."

CHAPTER XXI.

WHATEVER might be the sorrow and the self-reproach, nay, the alarm which laid hold of Oswald Langton in consequence of some of the details of Katherine's journal, it would be untrue to say that, to one circumstanced precisely as he was, the impression produced by its perusal could be so absolutely, so altogether painful as to exclude emotions of a different kind; for in no other way could he have been made to feel so vividly the warm and breathing life of that affection of which he so sorely missed the tokens in his daily and hourly existence. He could not, therefore, regret the chance which had afforded him this clear and distinct knowledge of Katherine's actual state of mind, albeit that knowledge was certainly not tranquillizing to his own; and, though he dreamt no dream of peril or terror, he rose next morning in a perturbed mood, which the lack of any actual business that day made it the harder to strive with. His mental disquiet was not lessened, either, by his happening (at the very hour when he thought himself most secure against such an unpleasant chance) to see, be seen by, and receive a gracious bow from Lady Carew. There was nothing, indeed, new or surprising in such an occurrence; in fact he had already met her

several times, face to face, without taking into consideration those glimpses when neither party was obliged to acknowledge the presence of the other, or his discovery, when in church on the preceding Sunday, that the being he could have wished himself farthest from was exactly two rows behind him. These things were only a portion of the daily torments which made Boulogne in every sense a "penal settlement" to Langton, who vainly endeavored to cheer himself with the hope that the morrow might bring him some definite view of a term beyond which his banishment could not be prolonged. But the morrow, besides bringing him letters, the contents of which dispirited him by a threatening of delays, supplied him also with fresh cause for disturbance in the arrival of a note, similar in appearance to that he had previously received, and, like it, conveyed by a messenger of whom no one in the hotel professed any knowledge. It ran thus: "You have not complied with my earnest request; and I am willing to think it possible you may not have received it. Its object was to implore you to write to Sir E., changing your mind, and agreeing to come to us; but if you are determined to avoid that (in which case I *must* find other means of speaking to you), leave an answer to this, directed to Madlle. Le Vert, in the hands of the porter of your hotel, from whom it will be called for this afternoon. I am watched by Argus eyes; but not, as you may guess, by those of one who has an official right to exert vigilance." Langton saw at once that the lady was determined to have an answer of one kind or other, and as it was plainly

necessary to put a stop to these missives, by any course in his power, he seized a pen, and wrote hastily: "It is impossible I should do what you ask; and if it be for any cause requisite that you should communicate with me, it had surely better be in writing." He directed it as he was requested, begged the porter to deliver it to whomsoever should ask for a note so addressed, and went out to take a long walk with Major Swinburne, his sole and only companion. The conversation, on the latter's part, turned chiefly on Captain O'Hara, and his evident intention to weary him (Swinburne) into concessions he was "determined to wait any time rather than make," and was wound up by remarks exchanged between him and Langton, on the number of men, formerly known to them in English society, but no longer to be seen there, who had unexpectedly "turned up upon them," both in the streets of Boulogne and in the "Hôtel d'Angleterre."

"I shall henceforth have the satisfaction," said Swinburne, "of knowing how to account for every fellow of whom I'm told 'no one can say what's become of him.'"

"The best satisfaction, I take it," observed Langton, drily, "that you or I, or anyone else, is likely to get out of anything connected with this infernal town;" and, having delivered himself of this opinion, he parted from his friend at the entrance of his hotel, where he learnt that his answer to Lady Carew had been called for by "une personne habillée de noir," and remained in hopes that no attempt would be made to extract another from him. He had (as has been before

noticed) received that day letters, of which one somewhat damped his hopes of returning home on so early a day as he had looked forward to; for it gave token of difficulties raised by one of Alexander's creditors against a compromise which had been regarded as all but effected. There was no reason to despair of its being so ultimately; but till it was accomplished, Alexander could not show himself in London, or go near the India House; and the fresh delay thus arising was vexatious in the extreme.

Oswald spent the afternoon in answering this unwelcome communication, in consulting with Swinburne on various points, and in "showing cause," as he best could, to Alexander, why it was unadvisable to accept an invitation to dinner from Watson, which his barely convalescent state put it in his power to decline without incivility. Alexander declared he was quite well enough (he had, in fact, improved wonderfully in the last forty-eight hours), but finally gave in, and agreed to content himself with a walk in the cool of the evening on the pier, where he trusted to come across "some fellows he hadn't seen anything of for the last fortnight; they weren't prigs, but hardly, he supposed, under quite the same ban as poor Watson." Oswald had also received, in the course of the day, a letter from Cecilia, which he had had no leisure to read through before dinner-time; so that, on leaving the "table d'hôte," as Alexander was not yet ready for his walk (having just found an acquaintance among the inmates of the hotel), he ascended to his own apartment, where he made use of the remaining daylight, to

study it with that quiet satisfaction a home letter gives, when one is no longer too impatient to gather the general contents for the enjoying of particulars. The tone of his sister's communication inclined him to fancy "that Kate must be in better spirits, or Cecy would not speak so cheerfully about her;" and the pleasure this feeling gave him was doubled when he perceived the fact (totally unsuspected by him before) of the letter's containing a postscript in *her* hand. It was not, could not be, an answer to his last; but he thought it more easy, more "like herself," as he called it, than the preceding ones, and he was beginning a second perusal of it when the door opened, "une dame" was announced, and, as he started from his seat and threw the letter on the table, he found himself in presence of Lady Carew!

She was plainly dressed, and her face covered with a thick veil, which she threw up as the waiter disappeared. Langton pushed a chair towards her without speaking, and then standing at some little distance from her, expressed, as connectedly as his amazement permitted, "his surprise at the honor of such a visit."

"It does, I daresay, surprise you," said she, calmly; "for you have probably attributed to me a degree of irritated feeling which has long passed from me; and you can, on the other hand, form no idea of the extreme need in which I stand of help—of counsel; such need that, although you not long ago refused me the aid I implored, I am fain to cling to the hope (held out to me in that very refusal) that you will not deny me such

service as you can render without involving a third person."

"I remember the letter you allude to," replied he, after a moment's pause; "and though your dealings with regard to me have been hardly of a nature to strengthen your claims, I am ready to afford you what assistance I can, since it concerns me and me only."

"I would not ask it, were it otherwise," returned she, humbly; "I have long been sensible that I erred in applying to you two months back; I did not enough consider *then* how entirely I had forfeited—how entirely another took up—your whole interest; nor did I (so much I will say for myself!) imagine that what I proposed could either pain or contaminate one so much more deserving—at all events so much more fortunate—than myself. You must not suppose either that the offence you allude to was malicious—deliberate. I went to Wyngate as a suppliant—was there given stronger proofs than ever of what I had not yet learnt to endure, and against my will—against my purpose—the truth burst from my soul; a weakness I should never forgive myself, had I not speedily found that you had, by whatever means, effaced the impression my involuntary words had created."

"I did not efface it," replied Langton; "to do that was scarce likely to be in my power; but as I met with an indulgence and generosity I had no right to expect, happiness I dared not hope for, I am the better able to forgive an action which well-nigh cost me all I prized."

"Then you confessed all?"

"You had left me no other choice. But,"

continued he, "you have not yet told me what assistance you are in need of, or what is the service you claim from me."

His visitor sighed deeply, and then said, after a kind of pause:

"You are impatient to be rid of all this! no wonder! your heart is where *she* is" (as she spoke she touched the open letter on the table, where Kate's hand was visible) "and it is fit it should be. Yet you have cost me very dear, Oswald Langton! Since from the day you took advantage of my folly in trusting to the respect of one I loved, I have lived as a reckless, consciously guilty thing, drifted hither and thither by impulses I have no longer the strength or the pride to combat. I complain not that you acted as—they say—all men act when so insanely trusted; but whichever of us deserves most reproach, this much is certain, that our punishments have been hitherto most unequal; seeing that you have been made happy, while I am given over to wretchedness, out of the depths of which I call on you to help me."

"And I will help you, if to do so be within the power of man," said he, not unmoved by the listless despair her words expressed, and more penetrated than he could a minute before have deemed possible by the melancholy softness of the large lustrous eyes so beseechingly cast on him by her whom he now found it difficult to believe so entirely his enemy as he, in his reason, still held her to be.

"That came from your heart!" cried she, with a faint smile; "I had almost begun to repent this

endeavor; but now I am persuaded you will not grudge me what I so sorely want—help and encouragement to enable me to keep my footing on an insecure path, to hinder my falling into the hopeless abyss which yawns for all women who have once erred, but from which I would fain be saved, in order to repent, and to win pardon from God if not from man!"

Langton had heard too much of Lady Carew's life at Lucca and at Florence, to be as much touched by this last appeal as by her former speech; but he listened in respectful silence, and then repeated the expression of his wish for farther explanation.

"I saw," resumed she, "that you could not understand my object in wishing for—in asking you to avail yourself of Sir Edward's invitations—thought you perhaps wondered I was not grateful rather for your refusal! And so I was—so I should be now—were it not that I find I did not know what I was doing, when I allowed Sir Edward to gratify his whim of making that overbearing boy, Fred Desborough, our travelling companion! Now if you would generously sacrifice your own liking—your own well-weighed resolution, it may be—so far as—while you *are* here—to add yourself occasionally to our party, the service to me would be inestimable!"

"Are you quite sure," asked Langton, whose distrust had now fully revived, "are you quite sure that it would be a service? Have you reflected . . . ."

"Oh, I have reflected till my brain goes round!" exclaimed she, "and I couldn't expect you to

comprehend intuitively, which is why I felt it necessary to *speak* to you; for of course it would be impossible for you to conceive . . . ."

But Lady Carew was here interrupted by the voice of a waiter, inquiring from without, "si Madame d'Alby se trouvait chez Monsieur?"

Langton rushed to the entrance, and opening just enough of the door to speak to the man, replied shortly in the negative, upon which the inquirer shrugged his shoulders and departed, saying by the way of excuse, "C'est de la part de Monsieur votre frère que je suis venu."

"Monsieur mon frère!" repeated Langton; "if Alexander thinks I have a visitor, he will be up here himself in a moment."

"Go down then! Go down and speak to him," said Lady Carew, putting on her veil hastily; "I forgot there were two of your name here, and was shown to *his* empty room below, first; but lose no time, and I will manage the rest."

Oswald hurried down to the "second," and on the landing-place met Alexander, who, having just dismissed the waiter he had sent up to the "quatrième," was already disposing himself to make an ascent to that region in person, when he was stopped by the appearance of his brother, asking him "what on earth made him fancy Madame d'Alby was upstairs?"

"Because I was told a lady who had asked for me (while I was talking to Gilmore) had been shown up to you by mistake, and I knew directly it must be that good creature come to see how I was, after the dismal report you had made me give of myself to Watson! Now what have you done

with her, Oswald? I'd bet anything you have been saying something to her that will prevent her ever paying me another visit! Where is she?"

"That's more than I can tell you," replied Oswald, "for I haven't even seen your friend; so much I can safely assure you."

"Not seen her," echoed Alexander, with a puzzled look. "Then how comes it that . . ."

At this instant Lady Carew, as much disguised as ever was Spanish "Tapada," brushed swiftly by him in her descent from the upper story, and was half way to the ground floor before he had breath to exclaim:

"I do believe it's Madame d'Alby after all! and I'll be hanged if I don't run after her and make sure!"

"Alexander, Alexander! don't make a fool of yourself!" said his brother, laying a strong hand on his shoulder. "When I tell you that no Madame d'Alby has been with me . . ."

"Then who *has?*" asked Alexander, as he sulkily disengaged himself from his grasp.

"How can you be so silly, Alexander? What visitors do you expect me to have? But," continued he, less impatiently, "if you would like to come up to my room, and read Cecy's letter before you go out, come now; only don't let us have any more of this nonsense on the public staircase."

Alexander "did like," he said, "to see Cecy's letter;" but observed to his brother as they went upstairs, "that if he hadn't told the whole truth, it was very sneaking of him."

Oswald made no answer; and when the Shadworth letter had been perused, both went out

together, as it was growing dusk, in the direction of the pier, where they met with Swinburne, and where Alexander, in spite of deepening twilight, caught sight of a Captain Elliott, accompanied by Frederick Desborough (who, with other friends, had been dining with him). He therefore soon attached himself to this party, and being still rather sore on the subject of the visit from Madame d'Alby he considered himself to have been cheated of—was not slow in making his complaint to such a sympathising listener as Fred.

"I shouldn't care," continued he, "shouldn't care so much, at least, if Oswald would have honestly told me he had given the widow a spice of his mind, and let her know his opinion of her brother; but that's what he won't do, and I hate pious frauds, and being deceived for my good like a baby!"

"Then," said Fred, "you are sure she *was* upstairs with him?"

"Sure—no—not quite that, couldn't see through her veil, you know; but she was every bit as tall; *that* I can swear to!"

"So, as far as you know, it might have been somebody else?" asked Fred.

"So it might," returned Alexander; "but then, who could it be? No, no, Fred, you are quite mistaken!" proceeded he, in answer to a sound meant by his companion for a laugh, but certainly not a merry one; "no, I don't think it was anything of *that* kind; I know you have got a good story or two about Oswald (though you have never given me the benefit of them, you rascal!); but all that is in the past tense, and 'respectability' is the

order of the day *now*, I assure you; and if it weren't that he looked so confoundedly odd when I asked him, if Madame d'Alby wasn't with him, who *was?*—I should believe him altogether."

"But why should he object so to your having a visit from Madame d'Alby?" inquired Fred.

"Oh, only because he is so prejudiced, and fancies Watson and his sister are perilous company for me. Then too, there is that pragmatical fellow Swinburne—I once overheard him telling Oswald that Madame d'Alby—if she had a right to the title of 'Madame' at all—was just so situated that it would be an advantage for her to get *any* man, rich or poor, to give her his name; and from that moment my wise brother has fancied she intended to catch me—as if I *was* a catch! It's all ill nature of Swinburne's, and he has bitten Oswald with it to that degree that I believe he would do and say anything to keep me out of her way; still it's odd, isn't it? that she should have been cowed into passing by me in a sort of incog, as one may call it, so off-hand as she is by nature too!"

Fred agreed that it was odd, and very odd; but having done so, seemed disinclined to prolong the conversation, and shortly took an early leave of Elliott and the rest, with whom Alexander remained listening, with intense interest, to the details of a matter which at the moment engaged the attention of all "*his* world" in Boulogne, namely a pigeon-shooting that some choice spirits were getting up, and was to take place in a few days from that time.

Alexander felt very doubtful whether, "as he was circumstanced," it would be free to him (even if still in Boulogne) to take any share in this

pastime; but he was therefore only the more anxious to hear every particular of time, company, conditions of the match, etc., as also who were the "shots" from whom most was expected. Somewhat to his surprise, he heard Sir Edward Carew's name mentioned, not only as a patroniser of the noble sport in question, but as a "shot" some deemed well worth betting on.

"Ah," said Elliott, "he was not unknown to fame at the 'Red House,' and has kept up his practice in *that* line, Desborough tells me, though he has long given up hunting; and to see the queer looking old fellow he is, you would never guess what an eye and hand he has! I'm afraid to say what distances he makes nothing of, for all the bottles of claret he has swallowed!"

Under the influence of the sweet converse he was enjoying, Alexander, who, to do him justice, was placable enough, forgot his grievances on the score of Madame d'Alby; and was moreover so much impressed by these accounts of old Carew's prowess, that after joining his brother and Swinburne again (as he did before Elliott's party had dispersed) he repeated almost word for word all he had gathered on the subject; and commenced a series of questions concerning Sir Edward, and what he (Oswald) knew of his accomplishments, which lasted till they reached the "Hôtel de Londres."

CHAPTER XXII.

Isabella Carew had loved Oswald Langton as much as so selfish a being can be said to love; but her rage at losing him had been rather that of a tyrant at the escape of a slave, than the grief of a loving woman for the departure and indifference of him in whom her every affection was centred. From the moment of her definitive quarrel with him in Paris, more than a year back, she had, to the extent of her power, been his "persecuting Juno;" and when she found that—contrary to her expectation, as well as to all apparent probability—he was accepted and acknowledged as Miss Desborough's future husband, her resentment was embittered with a hatred so intense (especially after his refusal to assist her in keeping up her position, by taking his bride to her house), as to be comparable to nothing save the inextinguishable wrath with which the fabulous Deities of the Greeks are represented as pursuing their victims. Her pursuit had been vain; since neither her self-accusations at Wyngate, nor the influence she afterwards strove to exert through Fred, had availed to hinder her former lover from winning and wearing the bride she had once bid him despair of ever obtaining. Her mortification was extreme, but the deed was done; and though her

wrath and hate continued unabated, they ceased (now their ends were literally past attaining) to gnaw her bosom so unremittingly; and she would probably, in default of anything else to interest or agitate her strongly, have shortly yielded to the passion which Fred Desborough had all but declared to her, had she not, at the very moment when her new lover thought himself—and probably was—on the point of success, caught sight of the old one, and perceived by his countenance, that whatever might be the precise nature and amount of the feelings awakened in him, it was certainly not with indifference he beheld her again. Now, if there were in her changeful and ungoverned mind one propensity stronger than another, it was that union of vanity and the love of power, commonly called "desire of conquest," which, in her, spread farther than what is usually understood by that phrase—inasmuch as it included a restless longing to have her sovereignty of grace and beauty acknowledged even in unseen corners, and most especially goaded her to force herself a way into hearts which she suspected of intentionally shutting themselves up against her influence. It has been already observed that a considerable part of Oswald Langton's original attraction for her had consisted in his being the only man, in the society in which she met him, who did not, as a matter of course, fling himself at her feet. It followed, therefore, that even as that circumstance then induced her to use all the arts she possessed, in order to cast over him the net in which she became herself entangled, so the knowledge that he wished to shun her was now likely to tempt her into as vehement

a desire to charm him out of his resolutions, as had seized her at the time of their first acquaintance. To say that she then, at that precise moment of her meeting with him, conceived the distinct project of bringing Oswald to repent of the union he had contracted in spite of her, and thereby working out a revenge sweeter than that she had failed to obtain, would be an exaggeration; yet it is certain that a change came over her, and a change unfavorable to Fred Desborough, who tasted the first fruits of her altered feeling, in losing the drive in which he was to have been her companion. A portion of that solitary drive was, it is true, spent in utter abandonment to the bitter thoughts called up by the necessity of exchanging civilities with her "betrayer," as she now generally denominated Langton, when communing either with herself, or with the Countess Korinski. The deed was done however, the Rubicon passed, and her agitation had already calmed down sufficiently for her to consider that this "cruel chance" might, if opportunity served, be turned to good practical account, when she learnt that her own stay at Boulogne was to be indefinitely prolonged through the indisposition of her child, and almost simultaneously discovered that Major Swinburne's knowledge of Alexander's whereabout provided her with a handle for addressing such a note to Oswald as would, she expected, necessitate his going through the form of paying her a visit, and probably oblige him to accept her husband's invitation to dinner. His presence would, she said to herself, be "misery," "agony;" nevertheless she desired it eagerly; and this eagerness she

justified to her own mind on the ground of the "advantage" it would be if she could draw Langton on to break the kind of vow to avoid her which she attributed to him. In a prudential point of view indeed, it must be owned that her reasoning was not entirely incorrect; for *if* she could succeed in so far hoodwinking his judgment and better feeling as to induce him to come within her doors, and thus put a stop to Sir Edward's embarrassing wonderings "why Langton chose to keep away from them now?" might she not also proceed to the farther conquest of bringing him, one day, to do her the very service he had formerly refused her—that, namely, of giving a decisive refutation to the hostile assertion "that no man who had known Lady Carew abroad would allow his wife to associate with her?" At all events she wished to try her power over him; and having once acknowledged to her own heart that she desired—for whatever reason—to attract him to the "Hôtel des Bains," she soon wrote to the Countess Korinski "that Oswald Langton's appearance at Boulogne proved his fate and hers to be so mysteriously entwined that it was impossible they could yet have 'parted for ever.' He was the only man she had ever *loved* (the disappointment which had partially piqued her into marrying Sir Edward being now never alluded to except as a 'childish fancy'), and wherever true love had existed, those it had bound were sure to cross each other's path more than once on earth!"

Like many other persons who have more imagination than sensibility, Isabella Carew was habitually fond of being shaken, by strong

emotions, out of the sleepy sameness of everyday existence; and she soon worked herself up into a mood in which it would be difficult to determine how much was real feeling, struck as it were like sparks from the ashes of a long extinguished fire, and how much was of that spurious kind of which her native pliancy and art combined to facilitate her giving every apparent token, with an ease that rendered her almost unconscious that it was a mere part she was playing. In this frame of mind, her irritation at the growing presumption of the stripling whose passion she had hitherto encouraged became excessive. That she was in his power she knew not; for, often as the words of reproach had risen to his lip, he had always, when it came to the point, lacked the daring to tax her, to her face, with the sins of which he possessed the too convincing proof. She only knew that he watched her unremittingly; that her indulgence had so emboldened him that he was fast growing unmanageable, and that there was not at Boulogne (in her circle at any rate) that crowd of "aspirants" she could have found in Paris or in Florence, who could keep him in check by their readiness to attend upon her in the manner she considered indispensable. Boulogne did not provide *her* with any amusement corresponding to that with which Mr. de Tourville's breakfasts provided her husband; and, in this vacant state, the oft-recurring glimpses of the constant object of her thoughts at once tended (on her side, at least) to rub off the awkwardness attending their meetings, and also to feed that mixture of vanity, caprice, and desire of paying

off old scores which she dignified by the name of "undying love." She saw that her first attempts to induce Oswald Langton to swerve from his steady determination of keeping away from the "Hôtel des Bains" had failed; "but would he adhere to it—if he knew precisely how she was situated—if she applied to him *herself* for counsel? if she told him she needed protection against that impetuous boy, whose insolence was such that she only hesitated to complain of it to her husband from the fear of his resenting it in a manner she should for ever reproach herself with?" She had claims upon Langton; that much was certain; the desire to urge them with her own lips was great, and her confidence in her power of prosecuting adventures of the kind so much strengthened by practice acquired in the last twelvemonth, that, had she been more of a free agent, she would have found her way to the "Hôtel de Londres" long before she did. Under the jealously watchful eye of Fred Desborough however, she dared not, and might never have dared it, had it not chanced that, on the very evening of his dining with Captain Elliott, Sir Edward fell into so sound a sleep, after such a remarkably hearty meal, that his wife felt sure he was "safe" for a good hour; and, eagerly snatching the opportunity, sped forth to the "Hôtel de Londres" (forgetful or regardless of Alexander's being one of its inmates), in the hope of convincing Oswald Langton that it was "his duty" at least to show himself in the "Hôtel des Bains." Interrupted, and forced to make her escape as she best could, she yet never lost her

presence of mind; and the quick beating of her heart, as she regained the apartment where her husband lay in profound repose, was not entirely to be ascribed to alarm; for, as she inwardly reflected while establishing herself in her accustomed chair, "she had had worse frights in her life."

Her chief regret, as she sat, or reclined rather, in her luxurious "chaise longue," was for the cutting short of the much-desired interview, of which she had undergone the full pain, without being granted time to reap the full reward. It was mortifying to have perceived that her visit had failed to strike one spark of pleasure out of him she had surprised by her presence; it mortified her, too, though she could scarcely have explained why, to discover that Oswald Langton had not bought his forgiveness from Kate by any deception whatever. Such as he was, and knowing all things, she had consented to be his. It was a strong tie upon a man's gratitude, if he had any gratitude in him, that is! But if these were discouragements, she had, on the other hand, seen that he had not listened to her without emotion; and she felt that he had, with regard to her, an amount of remorse which would have facilitated her working on him, and must, she thought, but for that fatal interruption, have hindered his stiffening himself against her so entirely as to refuse the slight favor she had to ask. Had he hearkened to her a few minutes longer, had he learnt, had he fully understood the sort of humiliating slavery in which she was held by Fred Desborough, to *that* appeal he must have given way! and of all this she had been cheated

through the blunder which had taken her at first into the wrong apartment! Would such a chance ever again occur? It seemed unlikely; but Isabella Carew was one of those persons who, being generally successful in "carrying her point" (whatever it might be), was apt to suppose that what was desirable was also feasible, and, on the supposition that the chance *would* recur, she gave herself up to a reverie (little interfered with by a few sleepy observations from Sir Edward, who was now gradually opening his eyes), in which her conversation with Langton was renewed; *her* claims on his gratitude admitted; *her* feelings sympathised with; *her* isolation pitied! But before she had (in imagination) succeeded in the re-awakening of that to which pity is so near akin, a speedy end was put to her dream by the entrance of Fred Desborough, nearly an hour sooner than she had looked forward to seeing him. Nor was his unexpected presence made the more agreeable to her by his asking immediately "if she had been out since dinner?"

"No," replied she, calmly; "I have not stirred from here, except once to give a look at Adela."

No rejoinder was made; Sir Edward roused himself up to ask questions about the dinner at Elliott's, the projected pigeon-shooting, etc., after answering which, with the desired detail, young Desborough retired, apparently, to rest, and his example was soon followed by the elderly "habitué" of the Red House.

Lady Carew, being no ways sleepily inclined, took up a novel; but she had not looked through many pages, when she was again astonished—and

this time almost alarmed—by the reappearance of Fred, who with a brow like midnight, and a voice scarcely articulate with passion, told her "he had guessed when she spoke just now she was duping him as she had long duped others! he *knew* it now! the porter had seen her go out and come in! Where had she been to?"

"Where have I been to, Fred? That is rather a singular question for you to ask, when I have just told you I have been nowhere!"

Her reply was made with such quiet dignity, that had it not been for the remarkable coincidence of Alexander's gossip with the porter's information, Fred Desborough must have resigned his suspicions on the spot. As it was, he stood half stifling with the conflict between love and rage; and his hand was already on the pocket-books, when the mildly uttered words "I see you are ashamed of yourself, Fred—and—I forgive you," arrested the action, and he sank down upon a chair in an attitude of powerless despondency, which might suit well enough with the "shame" which it was the lady's cue to assume he *ought* to feel. She bid him a "good night," which he barely answered, and she retired to her own room, angered and disturbed indeed by this additional proof of the manner in which her actions were spied into; but satisfied (as to the main point of safety) that her justification of herself had been successful. She felt however, with no small accession of bitterness, that an extra dose of flattery and attention would be necessary for the next few days "to raise Fred's spirits," and thus bring him to forget the inconvenient accuracy of the door-keeper of the "Hôtel

des Bains." What thraldom! When—how should she rid herself of this youth, whose passion for herself rendered his presence a greater restraint than that of the strictest Duenna, yet with whom, for a thousand petty reasons of expediency and vanity, she did not choose to quarrel? She would have liked him to leave her; but she would not, as she said to herself, "send him away to join the pack of her enemies;" and her perplexities only stimulated her desire of regaining, by whatever means, some influence, some power, some hold in short, over her former lover.

He meanwhile, as he sat musing at midnight in his hot apartment, in the "quatrième" of the "Hôtel de Londres," was deriving his chief comfort from his conviction that the fright of that evening must have been such as to scare his unwelcome visitor out of all wish to have more to say to him. He did not imagine, as some would in his place, that Lady Carew, in spite of the successors she had so rapidly given him, was yet a species of Gulnare, who sinned only in recklessly obeying the instincts of an undisciplined but loving heart, which beat for him and him alone; he had too much sense, and too little conceit, to be overcome by such a delusion. He thought, with a very just appreciation of her character, that she had been impelled to that evening's fool-hardiness by a craving to excite interest, mingled with a spiteful desire to embarrass and annoy him. He did not believe that she had any real need of assistance, or that, if she had, *he* could by possibility afford her any; and all the resentment which the magic of her words and looks had partially allayed,

revived in its full strength, to do battle with the voice of conscience, which bid him remember that if, through her self-willed levity, he were made to share the inward punishment she had incurred by the loss of self-respect, it was a "just judgment." He passed a wakeful night in a turmoil of anxious reflections, alternating between unsatisfactory remembrances of his past life and a redoubling of feverish eagerness to be free to return to England. "Once at home with Kate," he said to himself, as he turned restlessly from side to side, "and I shall know peace; but till then my whole existence within and without is struggle and conflict!" Towards morning he sank into such a heavy sleep that he did not rise so early as usual, and was but just dressed when a knock at his door announced a visit from Fred Desborough. The young man entered with a worn, haggard look, which told of a night spent even more sleeplessly than Langton's. He scarcely wished him good-morning, but began at once by asking bluntly, "if the day of his return were yet fixed?" to which question his brother-in-law replied (without taking notice of the discourteous mode of putting it), by briefly explaining the difficulties that had arisen, and the necessity of again waiting the result of letters from London.

"I thought that, or something like that, would be told me! The truth is, Langton, you are not here on that business a bit!"

"On what am I then?"

"Oh, you know best! but if you expect me to stand by and look on coolly while you neglect Kate, as you are doing, and carry on underhand correspondence and meetings with ladies with

double veils on, you have little notion of whom you have to deal with!"

This was a home thrust which almost deprived Langton of his breath; but instantly recovering his presence of mind, and with it his firm and settled conviction that whatever gossip Desborough might have picked up among the waiters, etc., at the "Hôtel de Londres," he *could* know nothing to compromise Lady Carew, he merely replied:

"Kate does not think herself neglected by my being here. My object in coming, I have told you more than once; I have had no other, I repeat; so that unless you absolutely doubt my word . ."

"As I unfortunately can't help doing!" interrupted he with a sneer.

"Do you know, Fred, those are strange words to use to me?"

"You think so, do you? You may make what you like of them!"

"If you mean you can't retract them . . ."

"Which I most assuredly can*not*—though, if you object to my having expressed my genuine opinion, I am ready to give you any other reparation for freedom of speech you may choose!"

"Fred," said his brother-in-law, gravely, "you are very young, and have very little command over yourself, and I must, it seems, have moderation for both. I told you once at Wyngate that I wouldn't quarrel with you; I tell you here I won't fight with you. You may call me what you please; it won't answer."

"There are names though," said Desborough, "that it is not very pleasant to be called publicly."

"I should stand them all sooner than be

frightened into challenging my wife's brother by the chance of some people's giving me an ugly name. So it's useless calling me what neither you nor (I believe) the rest of the world think me to be."

Fred knew this at least to be true; but he persisted in his attempts to provoke, by saying "that was at least a safe resolution."

"It is, Fred, for both of us," answered Langton; "as to the rest, my reputation—supposing I heeded reputation of this kind compared to weightier things—does not live in your report; and if you cannot behave civilly to me in my own room, you would do best to leave it. I am not likely to intrude my company on you elsewhere."

"Then I am to understand I am refused satisfaction?" growled Fred, in sullen wrath.

"I have done you no injury, Fred, so owe you no satisfaction; to a man I was conscious of having wronged, my answer might be different; but you have had mine. Nor would I so much as allude to your implied accusation of being wanting to your sister in *any* sense, were it not that I don't choose to enable you to say that I, by my silence, acquiesced in it. It is as false as your supposition that I am here for any other end than Alexander's business."

"When a man will neither speak truth nor give satisfaction, there is no use in farther talk with him!" and with these words, Desborough quitted his brother-in-law's apartment.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IF Oswald Langton was thankful, when left alone, for having been enabled to keep his temper so fairly with that "mad boy," as he denominated him, he was also perplexed in no ordinary degree. For, as frequently happens, his total ignorance on one point (that, namely, of Alexander's blundering indiscretion, and its coincidence with the porter's evidence), prevented his seizing on what might otherwise have afforded him a clue to the true grounds of the abiding hostility towards himself which had just been exhibited. His endless conjectures on the subject failed to bring him any nearer to the discovery of them. He knew already that Fred regarded him as one who had wished to interfere with his freedom of action, and moreover looked on him as a foe and slanderer of Lady Carew; yet these were old causes of offence: what could have made either more heinous since they last met? He could not guess; but the lawlessness and violence of his brother-in-law's nature had been so thoroughly laid bare to him at the time of their first acquaintance (on the occasion of that misadventure in the Kingsford Theatre, from the consequences of which *he* had rescued him), that Langton considered, on mature reflec-

tion, that *nothing* Fred Desborough did or said ought to have astonished him; that he had probably been long on the look out for some handle for picking a quarrel, and now thought he had found one. Desborough was not, he knew, above seeking for information in very subaltern quarters; and he concluded therefore, that having gathered from the tattle of the hangers-on of the "Hôtel de Londres" a sort of story which might bear an equivocal appearance, he had welcomed it as supplying him with a pretext for standing forth in righteous indignation as the "avenger of his injured sister." With this solution of the somewhat startling event of the morning, Oswald was at least so far satisfied as to seek no deeper for its cause. To make inquiries in the hotel as to what communications might have been held with members of its establishment, he judged for every reason inexpedient; and so desirous was he to bar the possibility of investigations being made, or curiosity being excited respecting the "veiled lady," that to Alexander, who that morning waked late and breakfasted later, he resolved to say nothing whatever of the provocation he had received. As regarded his own line of conduct, he determined, as far as might be in his power, to avoid needlessly irritating Fred with his presence. "But," said he to himself, "if I do come across him unawares, as people are always doing in this confounded place, and if he does choose to affront me publicly—though I hardly think he will, for his own sake—why, I can stand it, as I have stood other things before."

He had not long made these "good resolutions," when he was, as he considered, "rewarded for

them," by being brought a letter from Kate, the answer to that written by him upon the perusal of the accidentally enclosed portion of her journal; and this time, at least, he had no cause to complain of set phrases or stiff sentences! It was a passionately grateful acknowledgment of his sympathy, his thorough confidence, his comprehension of her every feeling; and though he could not flatter himself that she had grown less anxious concerning things and persons at Boulogne, there was no indication of that pent up wretchedness the expression of which had so pained him in her former fragment. She even said "she was comparatively happy, now she felt certain of being *told everything*."

In taking counsel with himself, only a few minutes back, he had just decided upon so much reserve as to abstain from farther irritating the fever of her overwrought mind by the knowledge of what had befallen in the last twenty-four hours; but as he read these words he wavered. What if his avoiding to mention the persons whose presence rendered the place of his abode so utterly odious to him should alarm her still more by the supposition that something dreadful was being concealed? What if—the thought had arisen before—he had rejected it *then*, almost in scorn—what if Fred, yet farther maddened by the contempt with which his violence had been treated, should seek to gratify his baffled spite by directly accusing him to his mother and to Kate of those very same offences which he had wished to make the pretext of a deadly encounter? He hoped—he trusted—he *believed*—that Kate would give no credit to such slander; but—but—he could not be absolutely

certain—could not be certain either of when he should be free to return to efface a false impression; and the dread lest such should be harbored for a moment even was enough to overturn all the reasons he had built up against that perseverance in "telling everything" for which both Katherine's letter, and his own heart pleaded too strongly for resistance.

"It is hard she should suffer through my sins—through her knowledge of them at least"—thought he, as he concluded his plain statement of facts—"and harder still that she who gave her that knowledge should have power to haunt and terrify her, even at this distance! But *I* have been frank and open; and while I am that I am secure from any of those misinterpretations which I dread more than aught else man or woman can inflict on me. If I were as sure of being at home in three days—ay, or five—as I feel of being able to cope with my ill-wishers here, I should be in pretty good spirits; and I have done my best to cheer Kate, by telling her what I believe in my heart, which is, that last night's wholesome fright on the one hand, and Fred's perception that I am immovable on the other, will ensure me personally against farther interruptions of the 'even tenor of my way.'"

In this trust he was confirmed by not receiving, during the next few days, any fresh token of Lady Carew's desire for "help and counsel;" though he was not allowed to hope she had left Boulogne or the "Hôtel des Bains," for he had, during that period, sundry glimpses of Sir Edward, as well as of Fred Desborough, who, without actually giving him the "cut direct," turned his head away, or

walked into a shop, whenever he saw his brother-in-law on the other side of the street. His occupations meanwhile consisted, as usual, in the writing of letters, in going over calculations connected with Alexander's affairs, or in listening to the details of Swinburne's endless negotiations with Captain O'Hara, concerning which he was every now and then called on to give an opinion. Such a colloquy had passed between them late on the evening preceding the day finally fixed on for that pigeon-shooting which occupied so much of Alexander's thoughts, and Oswald had bid his friend "good night" in a mood which the discourse he had been taking part in had not contributed to enliven, when his despondency was suddenly turned into joy by finding, awaiting him at the "Hôtel de Londres," a letter from his lawyer in London (brought by a private hand), which gave him the welcome intimation that the troublesome creditor had given in, that the compromise had been effected, and that all difficulties were therefore at an end.

"So!" cried Alexander, "we can start by the early boat to-morrow!"

"Not exactly," returned Oswald; "you know I can't do my business at the banker's till after to-morrow's early boat is gone (besides having promised Swinburne to go with him to be witness to some proposals he has to make to that rascal); but to look forward with certainty to being off to-morrow evening is a satisfaction I certainly did not hope for half-an-hour ago!"

A silence ensued, during which the one brother began already busying himself with a commencement

ment of preparations for that "starting to-morrow," the thought of which gladdened his whole soul, while the other sat listlessly by the open window, apparently sinking into a brown study, out of which however he presently so far shook himself as to say, in a hesitating voice:

"Oswald, I don't believe I have ever yet thanked you properly—yet it isn't for want of—from indifference to—but somehow . . . ."

"My dear fellow," interrupted Oswald, "you will thank me best by keeping your resolutions, and going on steadily in India!"

"Yes, I mean it, I'm sure, and I know you don't mind about formal thanks and all that; still I *do* want you to know that I have never forgotten a minute what I have been costing you and Kate; and I wanted to tell you, if I could, that I am at bottom gladder than I seem at your being released and going home directly; only—you see—I can't feel just as you do; for after all, though I believe the best is being done for me that can be, I am not able to forget that I am going to India among strangers, while you are to stay in England with Kate Desborough!"

"Kate Langton, if you please, Alexander," said Oswald, in whom his brother's lack of manly hopefulness excited a momentary impatience, which he nevertheless got over soon enough to add good-naturedly, "That does, I allow, make a great difference between you and me for the time being. But if you will be energetic instead of idle, if you give your mind to your profession and stick to it, you will not only create yourself an interest independent of the kind of things you have hitherto

spent your life in, but you will earn yourself the power of having one day a home of your own—and—a Kate of your own, if you like!"

"A Kate of my own! that's new doctrine from your mouth, Oswald. I thought you set your face against any one's marrying who isn't twice as well off as I could ever expect to be! I'm sure I've heard you declare a dozen times we might all take warning by Spencer!"

"So I have, I daresay," replied his brother, who was pulling a carpet bag out of a corner; "but I have changed my mind on some points; and besides, no man is obliged to take such an utterly silly or utterly penniless girl as Alicia—though I will say she has improved to a degree I never looked for."

"Well," said Alexander, in a tone which, for him, was deeply meditative, "I do suppose that if one has wit enough to make a better choice, one needn't be so uncomfortable as Spencer is. But as for you, Oswald, it's easy for you to talk about 'energy,' and 'adapting one's self to one's circumstances,' and so forth, when you, without taking any such trouble, have got precisely what Jack Hume calls 'luck buttered'—fine girl, good fortune, good connections, everything a fellow could wish for; there's nobody I know has had such luck!"

"Yes," replied his brother, "I *have* had luck! luck so wonderful that it has sometimes half frightened me to think of! But it is true, for all that, that an unemployed, aimless life has, directly and indirectly, harmed me; it would be long to tell how. I shall have no lack of business henceforward, for,

if I am to farm to any purpose at Calthorpe, I shall have to get up early in the morning, and work hard *not* to undergo the proverbial fate of a gentleman who takes up that trade! Certain it is, I would not, for any consideration, live the life I have led over again; and out of my own experience I warn you against idleness."

"If you mean," returned Alexander, after a sort of ruminating pause, "that you got into mischief now and then, why, you always got out again! you must have, to be where you are now! so that doesn't much signify."

"It does signify," replied his brother, "signifies more than I would once allow, or you can yet believe. It signifies a great deal, quite irrespectively of the immediate consequences it may or may not have; and I wish from my heart I could get Henry to see that before worse comes of it. But we shall have other opportunities of discussing this; and at the present moment, the best preparation we can both make for being 'energetic' to-morrow, is to give ourselves a good night's rest."

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOR the first time since he had been at Boulogne, Oswald lay down with the hopeful feeling that he might now venture literally to "count the hours" between the present moment and his arrival at home; he slept that dreamless sleep which best rewards fatigue of mind and body, and waked to the delightful remembrance that this was the last day of durance and disagreeables. Breakfast over, he set forth to the Banker's, and having soon despatched his business there, returned to the hotel, and stopping at the second floor, found Alexander with an open letter in his hand, looking so dismayed, that he instantly ejaculated:

"Has anything gone wrong with those people in London? and shall we have to stay on here, after all?"

"No, no—not quite so bad as that; but what do you think of Cecy's fussing so much over Kate's melancholy looks that she is actually sending poor Lewis off here—before he had been back a couple of hours from Ashe Grange either—to 'take your place,' as she calls it? And we may 'look for him in a few hours.' Now did you ever hear the like? But I must ask you a thousand pardons, Oswald, for opening your letter; they

brought it to me, and I never looked at the direction till I had broken the seal and half read through the few lines in it; there's a scrap besides from Kate herself. I haven't read *that*, I assure you," said he, with a laugh, as he handed his brother the tiny strip of paper, which only contained these words: "I am afraid you will be very angry with me for not utterly refusing Lewis Markham's surpassing kindness; but indeed, after your last, it was beyond my power! So don't abuse me!—or rather, *come* and abuse me as much as you please. I can bear anything, except your staying where you are!" "Now isn't that vexatious?" said Alexander.

Oswald's eyes were fixed upon the note, which he read and re-read with a feeling deeper than mere vexation. "It is my own fault," was his inward reflection, as he compared the date with the contents. "I ought not to have told her of that woman's visit, or of that boy's madness! I have made a great mistake; the knowledge of it has been too much for her; and the worst of it is that, in spite of all their kindness, they *must* think her weak, impatient, childish, when all the while . . ."

"Well," said Alexander, "you have studied that long enough; and I hope you agree with me in thinking it too bad!"

"Too bad indeed!" returned Oswald, who immediately felt the necessity of making a suitable reply. "Too bad indeed you may call it! I shall have to lecture Kate properly for her selfishness when I get home."

There was something however in the idea of

"getting home," and of being near enough to Kate to be able to "lecture her," which was in itself so pleasant, that though he went on to say he was "quite ashamed of her," his countenance began to show plainly that nothing (not interfering with his return, that is) could long put him out that day.

"Now," said Alexander, "this all comes of your nonsense in not choosing to trust me here by myself, when I'm sure . . . but it's very kind of Markham, I must confess, though it's of course to oblige Cecy he does it (not that that lessens the kindness), only I should have thought *she* had been wiser. She is a fortunate woman, any way, to get a man like Lewis Markham to do what she pleases —fortunate woman indeed to get him at all! I never can think of poor dear Cecy's marriage without wondering how such a thing ever came to pass! Now isn't it strange that . . ."

"That any man should think of any woman seven years older than yourself?" interrupted Oswald, with a smile; "yet you don't seem astonished at half your acquaintance for being in love (as you tell me they are) with Madame d'Alby, who has—looks at any rate as if she had—the advantage not only of you, but of Cecilia, by seven years!"

"Oh—Madame d'Alby—yes, I daresay; but then you know that's different!"

"Rather different, I allow," observed Oswald, parenthetically, as he carelessly took up his sister's note, which, in his eagerness to read Kate's, he had first neglected, and then forgotten to peruse.

"What I meant," persisted Alexander, "was only just that if Lewis intended to take her at all,

I wonder he never thought of it before this Summer. Better late than never though, and she is next in luck to you, Oswald—who, I will say, are the very luckiest fellow I know of!"

"I give you leave to say so, Alexander, when I am at Shadworth, and have found all well there!" returned Oswald, over whose countenance an anxious cloud was again passing, for it had just struck him that the last sentence in Cecilia's letter seemed written on purpose to prepare him for some terrible alteration in Katherine's looks.

"Nonsense, Oswald, it's the truth; and what can be the harm of saying it? for lucky you are; and Kate will be all right again the moment she sees you, if that is what you are thinking of."

"Partly; but luck or no luck, I must betake myself to the regions above, where I expect Swinburne to join me in five minutes' time; and after we have discussed the paper he gave me to look over last night, we shall probably go out together. Don't forget your letter to Warner, Alexander," continued he, turning round as he stood in the doorway; "the best thing you could do would be to set about it now; for *one* of us must be here, in case of Markham's turning up—not that I think the boat will be in yet awhile."

Alexander was not exactly pleased to be reminded of the letter, for he had privately intended to go out, in order, if possible, to witness the start of such of his friends as were happy enough to be preparing for the great event of the day (the pigeon-shooting, namely), which was to take place at a farm between three and four miles from the town. He did not however quite venture to plead

for this preferable mode of employing his time, and only testified his reluctance to the task imposed on him by a piteous yawn, in which he indulged while his brother hastened up the "quatrième," with such an elastic step, and such a sparkling eye, as proved that, in spite of his excessive provocation at Markham's useless journey, and in spite of the momentary alarm his sister's postscript had just given him, he still expected "that all would come right the moment they got to Shadworth." "Alexander calls me a lucky fellow," said he to himself, as he opened the door of his room, "and I *am* lucky to get away without more . . ." But even as this thought arose, his eye, which was seeking on the table for Swinburne's paper, was caught by something else, directed to himself in *that* hand the sight of which never failed to inspire him with a terror not unlike that with which the "summoned man" beheld the sign which called him to appear before the Judges of the "Vehm Gericht!" He snatched it up, tore it open hastily, and read the following lines:—

"It has become daily, hourly, more needful for me to obtain the counsel and help you only can bestow; yet since *that* evening I have watched in vain for an opportunity; I have it now; *both* are absent for a definite space of time, during which I can receive you here without risk. If you are generous, you will conquer your repugnance and come; but if within twenty minutes you do not appear, I shall be compelled to take anew the venture of seeking you in your own apartment; for consult you this morning I must!"

It seemed as if this communication had arrived on purpose to corrode, if not to destroy, all the elements of peace and happiness which were buoying up Oswald Langton's spirit, and bearing it aloft over all clouds of despondency and apprehension. A minute back, naught stood 'twixt him and all his heart panted for, save a given space of sea and land, which he reckoned on traversing in a given number of hours; but now, before he could again enjoy an unalloyed thought of his hoped-for meeting with Kate, he must go through a gulf of torment, which he dreaded not only on account of its actual and immediate pain, but yet more, if possible, from a vague feeling of contingent yet permanent evil to be brought on him and his by any dealings with her he justly denominated "the falsest of women." There was no escape, however. As he had once said to Katherine, "some links of the devil's shackles hung on him still," nor could he absolutely rid himself of them; since it *was* true that he had cost Isabella Carew dear, it *was* true that he had only a few evenings back promised her "whatever aid his power could afford;" and whether she were or were not in any such strait as she represented herself, it was clear that upon seeing him she was determined, while it was equally clear that to allow her again to risk seeking him in an apartment in which (setting apart all other chances) he every moment expected Swinburne, was impossible. He therefore traced a hurried line to his friend, begging him to await his return if in his power, reduced to atoms the ill-omened missive which called him away, and betook himself at once,

albeit with sore ill-will, to the "Hôtel des Bains," where he was immediately shown the way to the Carews' apartments.

In ascending the stair, a feeling of reluctance almost amounting to horror laid hold of him, impelling him to retrace his steps rather than endure another exchange of speech with her whose love and enmity had both gone so near to mar his happiness; but he shook off the feeling as cowardly; and saying to himself, "she won't exactly lay an ambush for me!" he knocked at the door of the ante-room. It was opened by the same attendant who had so often assisted his progress to and from her mistress's apartments in the "Rue Castiglione," and the sight of this woman was not calculated to efface the species of disgust which had already crept over him. But he followed her, as it were resignedly, from room to room of the handsome and spacious suite, till they reached Lady Carew's own, at the entrance of which his guide stood still and bid him go on. He did so; and, on his appearance, the lady of that inmost bower sprang towards him with a delighted eagerness, which however something either in his countenance or her own feelings suddenly checked; for she stopped in her joyful advance, drew back a little even, and said, with an unsteady voice, while he greeted her silently:

"I am grateful to you for not despising my entreaty! It shows me that you are generous as of old!"

"You know," replied he, "that you may command my services; and I am come, since it is out of your power to receive a written communication, to learn in what manner they may avail you."

"It is, indeed, out of my power!" returned she; "I would not else have pressed on you what I believe costs you some effort; though it need not, if your dislike is connected with—if you have any fear, that is, of a recurrence, on my part, to old times. What is past is past; and there is no use," continued she, as she sank into the nearest chair, "either in regret or in complaints. My object in sending for you was not to give vent to mere unhappiness; no, I am not so despicably weak! It is because I am in need of protection that I call upon you! Yes, protection against Fred Desborough! You are amazed, I see; and would tell me, I doubt not, that if I truly wished to be rid of the presumptuous boy, I have only to show him that his presence is disagreeable to me. Such advice is easily given. But that precocious serpent, whose childish admiration had, I confess, amused me longer than it ought, is not to be dealt with so readily. I was unwise, I know, in allowing myself the pastime (I had no other!) of observing his ways, little dreaming that anything so babyish would suddenly glow into so furious a passion; would understand so well how to press and urge it; would be so devoid of the feeling which deters a man of honor from making use of *every* means that can bring his victim into his power!"

The spell which Isabella Carew had once exercised over Langton had been long since broken; but it was not in nature, not in *his* nature at any rate, to gaze absolutely unmoved upon that face—that countenance—as it changed from the gentle softness of one who acknowledged her error, to

the bitter indignation, the wounded pride of an insulted woman. He was aware, moreover, that Fred Desborough's disposition rendered it perfectly possible for her accusations to be no way exaggerated; and false as she was, and as he believed her to be, his heart could not remain utterly hardened towards one with whose causes of unhappiness he felt himself but too much entwined. He uttered no word; but an indescribable something about his eyes and mouth revealed his emotion to his companion, who now went on:

"Fred Desborough watches my every step; has already taxed me with things which—which—if he had indeed the power of proving them, might be my destruction! I could have defied him once; but now, how can I do otherwise than tremble night and day before a being who is as subtle as he is unscrupulous? He makes no secret of his suspicions; has already told me 'he knows I am duping him as I have long duped others!' What does he know? what can he suspect?"

Langton did not immediately reply; but after reflecting for a minute or two, while a thousand rapid combinations flitted through his mind, he said slowly and deliberately:

"It is not possible he can *know* anything that should give you real uneasiness; but his nature is jealous, suspicious; and, besides, it would not be unlike him to seek to terrify by throwing out hints, as if he possessed proofs of what can, at worst, be only the vaguest conjecture."

"Thank you! thank you! it is a great consolation to me to find you think so! But for the future?"

continued she eagerly, "what do you advise me to do for the future? You know that to my husband I dare not, must not appeal. Yet alone I cannot cope with my persecutor, except on the wretched conditions of doing as I have done for these five days—that is, bearing with and submitting to his humors, lest, like a half-tamed beast of prey, he should turn and rend me! *You* could assist me if you would; *your* prescence here now and then would be a curb to his violence, might nip some suspicions in the bud! If you granted me that favor, you might indeed serve me—might free me from this odious slavery! for seeing, with your own eyes, what I can only *tell* you, your situation might enable you to influence him, or perhaps, so to influence his family as that *they* should work on him to renounce the position (offered to him in foolish good-nature by Sir Edward) of our travelling companion!"

Langton's face contracted severely as she made this proposal, and he answered coldly, "that Fred Desborough's family, his mother and sister at least, *had*, as he should have supposed her to be aware, done all in their power to prevent his going abroad that Summer. He himself was the object of too unfriendly a feeling on the young man's part, for any advice he gave to be otherwise than misinterpreted. Yet," proceeded he, "if there be any means you can point out, by which I could attain some chance of influencing him to cease intruding himself, I am willing to employ them; only you ought to consider, for your own sake, whether my making such an attempt might not

confirm him in impressions you would rather see effaced from his mind."

She had by this time perceived she had made a mistake, had gone too far, and now said submissively:

"You must not suppose me to know all that Fred Desborough might, if he chose, impart to me. How gladly I should have made common cause with his relations! I see, too, that I have asked what I ought never to have asked of you—should not, had I reflected! Tell me, I implore you, that you are sure I never dreamt of your running the slightest risk for me!"

"There would be no risk, as regards me, in my having another discussion with Fred Desborough; he knows he can't make me quarrel with him, knows I won't let myself be drawn into what I am determined against."

"Then he *has* tried to do so?" inquired Lady Carew, this time with unfeigned alarm.

"He has been my enemy ever since he knew I was to be his brother-in-law; for what reason he best knows; and you are sufficiently acquainted with him to be aware that his passions are not controlled by any ordinary respects or considerations."

"You mean that he has endeavoured to make you challenge him?"

"It amounted to that, but it was useless."

"And when was this? tell me!"

"The morning after you came to the 'Hôtel de Londres.'"

"Then," said Lady Carew, growing deadly pale, "he had discovered that I went there! How

blind I have been! I knew I was mistrusted, watched, accused to my face of duplicity; but if I had thought he could have grounds for suspecting *that*, I should never have sent for you this morning! How much longer do you stay in this place?"

"Not beyond the starting of the evening steamer."

"No! Desborough said you would be detained many days more!"

"So I feared till last night, when I found my business here was unexpectedly brought to a conclusion."

"Then you go to-day?" exclaimed she, clasping her hands, "and we shall meet no more!"

"It is surely little to be regretted by either," replied he, looking on the ground.

"Perhaps not—perhaps not—but still, though I make no complaint, fate *is* very unequal. Kate Desborough is counting the minutes till your return—you don't deserve your happiness, Oswald Langton!"

"No one knows that better than I," replied he; "for what has been given me I thank God and my wife; and you are free to wonder that I have been permitted so much. Is there anything farther that you wished to communicate to me?"

"No, nothing more—except my grief at having let that escape me which did escape just now! It was wrung from me by the contrast of your happiness and my misery." As she uttered the last word, her countenance changed, she started up with the look of one listening to a distant sound, and said, in a voice scarcely articulate from terror, "They can't surely be back yet!"

"If they are," cried Langton, bitterly, "there will be less of that contrast you spoke of!"

"It's hardly possible," returned she, panting for breath; "yet it sounded like our calèche at the front door! Make haste to be out of these rooms, and if you are met on the stair, remember you have been visiting the Arbuthnots."

She opened the door, through which he hurried, closing it rapidly behind him, and she remained in an agony of fear, setting her ear to the key-hole to assure herself, if possible without rashly coming forward, whether there were indeed ground for the alarm she had conceived. Her room was at the back of the hotel, yet so situated that, when certain passage-doors were open, its inmates could distinguish the rattle of wheels in front. She hoped for some seconds that she had been mistaken, or at least that the arrival had not been that of Sir Edward. But this encouraging thought had scarce arisen within her, when she heard footsteps and raised voices from the saloon, or perhaps the ante-room; and she was doubting whether to wait unseen or show herself boldly, when she shrank back, paralysed by the sound of a quick tread approaching her door, which however was not, as she expected, flung open by the person that had hastened up; for whoever he might be, whether Fred Desborough, or Sir Edward's valet, he turned the key outside, and she found herself a prisoner. She was not only too well aware of the uselessness of praying for release tc make any request for it, but she was also too eager to catch what she could of the angry exchange of speech passing but a few yards from

her, to think at that moment of her own personal freedom. It was plain that Oswald Langton had been met with *within* the suite of apartments, and she clearly distinguished her husband's ironical expression of astonishment at seeing him there, "after he had so many times declined honoring him with his company." The answer to this observation was inaudible to her; but whatever it might be, it was cut short by a contemptuous interruption from Sir Edward, who said "*that* might serve well enough, if he were still in the dark as to former proceedings!" What followed thereupon she knew not, for the two men walked farther away, talking eagerly indeed, but so rapidly, and—as it seemed—simultaneously, that nothing distinct reached her more, though their tones left her no possibility of doubting that a quarrel had arisen. To what such a quarrel must lead, under circumstances where the offended party made it a point of vanity, as well as honor, to resent injuries in person, she knew exactly. Sir Edward's age had not, she was well aware, lessened his readiness to keep up the reputation he was proud of having obtained himself in past times, and Langton was, she believed, unlikely to be able, even if willing, to act with regard to him as he had done by Desborough. The result of the stormy conversation now passing was therefore evident to her; and when the noise of hurried steps speeding away, and the loud closing of the outer door of the suite of rooms, announced to her the departure of one, probably of both the foes, she was as certain as if she had followed in their track, that each had gone

in quest of a "friend" to arrange their meeting, as soon as might be, on the Downs behind Boulogne.

An icy chill came over her as she grew sensible of the utter silence which now succeeded the sounds of angry strife in the adjoining rooms. She called, but no one answered to her call; she rang, but she rang in vain; and it presently occurred to her that other doors besides her own might have been locked, and that measures had been probably taken which would effectually prevent her from holding any communication with the outer world. She saw her utter helplessness, and acknowledging in despair that she was in a strait out of which there was no hope of extricating either herself or Langton, she ejaculated, "This is Fred Desborough's doing. I know it! I see it all now! He meant me to encourage him to stay here with me, and let Sir Edward go off alone to the pigeon-shooting! I wouldn't understand him; I let him see, too late, that his insolent freaks were not to be always indulged, and verily he *has* revenged himself! But who would ever have guessed by his face—by what stretch of thought could I imagine that he knew enough—and, after all, what *did* he know that I could not explain away, if I only had Sir Edward here for half an hour!"

The difficulties with which Fred Desborough's "mad passion" had surrounded her, had rendered her interesting in her own eyes ever since the project of regaining influence over her old lover had occurred to her; she had made use of them likewise (with the instinctive feeling that they furnished the best handle for doing so) to interest

him; but it was not till within the last few minutes, it was not till she had gathered from Langton the nature of what had passed on the morrow of her visit to the "Hôtel de Londres," that she began in downright earnest to understand that she must be, to a degree beyond anything she had ever imagined, *in the power* of the young aspirant to her favor. Had the fears and annoyances which she had made the most of been previously as real as they now instantaneously became, she would probably have come to terms "with the enemy;" would at any rate have abstained from that proposal of repeating her visit to the "Hôtel de Londres," with which she enforced her request to Langton, and which virtually necessitated his visit to *her*. She had not, in fact, feared Fred Desborough enough to understand that, while parting from her that morning with a smooth brow and a quiet "good-bye," his heart was angrily whispering, "I gave her a last chance—she has thrown it away!" She knew not that though, after the failure of his attempt to take vengeance on his brother-in-law in what he considered a gentleman like and honorable manner, he had deeply sworn to bring him, by *whatever* means, to destruction—he had yet, under the influence of her bewitching flattery, constantly wavered in his resolution, up to the moment when it was fixed by her failing to make use of her "last chance." She had not been by to see how the accidental question from Sir Edward, while they were driving together to their destination, of "whether they were likely to meet the Langtons?" had caused the smouldering fire to flame out; and it was not till long afterwards that she discovered how that con-

ceited confidence in his own merits which had made Sir Edward deaf to the accusations brought against her by the Scudamores, respecting Neyrac and Captain Clifford, had given way upon the production (by one he deemed perfectly disinterested) of the matching pocket books, or how at sight of the words "Pegno d'amore," he had bid the coachman turn round and drive back. These things she could not know; but she already saw that the wealth, the position, for which she had sold herself in marriage, was now irrecoverably lost—lost through the rashness with which she had followed up her desire to gild over the mortification of the past with a fresh triumph of vanity! Instead of triumph, she had encountered defeat; instead of treading the path of victory, she had been forced to perceive and comprehend that Oswald Langton's heart was so well defended that all attacks on it were vain; while in her own breast she had revived the embers of a feeling that now struggled with—nay, overpowered—the wrath and hate which would, a few short weeks back, have almost rendered her content to buy Oswald Langton's ruin with her own. "Fred Desborough knows how it will be, as well as I do," said she to herself—"it is his object! Nothing would satisfy him short of the death of his victim." *His* victim! was he then, as she would fain have persuaded herself, the victim of Fred Desborough *alone?* She tried to think so, but in this her hour of punishment the piercing voice of conscience *would* be heard, and something from the very depths of her soul called upon her to answer *who* it was had fostered Desborough's ill-conditioned dislike to the man who had done him a service, till that

dislike became positive hatred? who it was that had so often assured him of Langton's unworthiness of her he was seeking in marriage, but to whom he had no heart to give? and again, who it was who had fed and encouraged the passion of the lawless boy she had made as much her tool as her plaything, till he had required of her all he suspected her of bestowing upon a rival? She *had* duped him, as he complained, and for what? For the sake of convincing Oswald Langton that, if Kate were fair of form, *she* was fairer; that, if Kate were loving and generous, *she* was more loving and more generous still! The gloss of romantic sophistry, under which she had been wont to hide from her own eyes the selfishness of her insatiable vanity, could veil it no more, and she shuddered, for the moment, at the deformity of her own heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

ISABELLA CAREW'S desire to escape, to rush forth, to ascertain with her own eyes and ears what was going on, though growing each instant more intense, was yet kept in check for awhile by such a sense of the shame attending guilt detected as hindered her from alarming the hotel by actually screaming for rescue, and thus attracting to herself the attention—perhaps the mockery—of strangers. She still hoped, besides, that every minute would bring her maid to her door; but as time went on without a step or a voice drawing near, her impatience became uncontrollable, and she began in desperation to consider by what means she could best obtain her freedom. Her little girl was established with her nurse, on another floor; the bell communicating with the apartment at present occupied by her maid, she had already used to no purpose; but the windows of her own room looked on an inner court, on the contrary side of which were other windows and a passage. Opposite to these she therefore stationed herself, and when, after some waiting, she caught sight of a servant hurrying by, she called out, telling him she was locked up, and requesting to be immediately released. To release her immediately, however, was not exactly possible; for as the dining-room

was found to be locked also, Lady Carew's chamber was only approachable through the opening up of a "porte condamnée" in a sort of closet; and when at last her door was reached, it appeared that its key, as well as that of the dining-room, had been removed; so that, before anyone could get in or out, the lock must be picked. When at last this was accomplished, she inquired for Sir Edward, for Desborough, and for her maid; but none of them were in the hotel, nor could anyone say whither they had gone. This intelligence, albeit confirming her worst fears, was given so calmly, and in such a matter-of-course way (it being assumed "que Monsieur avait emporté les clefs par distraction") as to show that nothing beyond the circumstances she was herself forced to declare, had become public; and Lady Carew's perception of this so far steadied her nerves as to enable her, with tolerable outward composure, to put on her bonnet, and walk (no great distance certainly) to the "Hôtel de Londres," at the door of which she quietly but boldly asked, "if Mr. Langton were there, and in his apartment?"

"There was a Mr. Langton within," she was told, "now in the coffee-room talking to a gentleman just arrived; it was the younger Mr. Langton," the waiter believed. She instantly requested to be shown into the presence of this Mr. Langton, who proved to be Alexander, whom she knew by sight (through Desborough's nodding to him in the street when walking with her), and who was now standing in conversation with some one whose appearance plainly showed him to be an "arrival

by the last boat." She addressed him without much ceremony, inquiring "if he knew where his brother was?"

"Not exactly at this moment," replied he, with some surprise; "he went out about half an hour ago, telling me to stay here for the arrival of a friend we were on the look out for; I expect him back any minute."

"Then you don't know at all in what direction he went?" urged she.

"Not I! I fancied he was most likely over the way, in Swinburne's rooms."

"Then he didn't *tell* you he was going there?"

"No," replied Alexander, "I only thought so."

"He did not mention either," persisted she, with an eagerness which attracted the notice of Alexander's companion (who was no other than Lewis Markham), "he did not happen to mention his having met Sir Edward Carew?"

"No, he said nothing, except that I was to wait for Markham there," answered he, indicating his brother-in-law as he spoke, with a sort of jerk of the head. "I don't think he could well have met Sir Edward, for I know he and Desborough were off to the match with the very first, and nobody is come back yet."

"*Sir Edward* is—came back long ago—and—and—but if I were quite certain—that is, if you were absolutely sure your brother is at Major Swinburne's, and has not gone out of the town . . . ."

Her increasing agitation prevented her from finishing her sentence, and Markham, who had by this

time discovered who she was, inquired of her "if she had any reason for thinking Oswald Langton *had* gone out of the town?"

"I can't tell—I don't know," returned she, hurriedly; "but the truth is, he called at our hotel to-day; there had been some disagreeables owing to his refusing invitations of Sir Edward's, it was alluded to, they had angry words—and—it is now some two hours since then—I grew anxious (for Sir Edward is nowhere to be found), and I am come to beg Mr. Alexander Langton to try and discover when his brother returned here from the 'Hôtel des Bains.'"

Inquiries were immediately made of the porter and servants, the result of which was the information that Oswald Langton had come in about two hours back, and had gone up to his room, where Major Swinburne was already waiting for him, that Major Swinburne had staid there about twenty minutes, at the end of which time he had been fetched away to his own apartments, to see a gentleman, who, wishing to speak to him on business, sent over a message to that effect, together with his card. After he was gone, Langton must have remained about an hour in his own room, as no one saw him till he went out half-an-hour since, when, as Alexander had before stated, he said something to him, as he passed his door, about staying where he was till Markham came. The thing now to be ascertained was whether he *were* at Swinburne's lodging, whither Alexander himself hastened, but returned presently, saying that neither his brother nor his brother's friend was now there, and that he could only

gather from the people of the house that they had gone out together, in what direction no one could assert. There was nothing in all this which Markham would have noticed as in the least peculiar, but for the perturbation of Lady Carew's manner, which appeared to increase when the waiter who had summoned Swinburne away "to speak to a gentleman on business," produced the accompanying card (he had picked it up on the stair), from which she read aloud the name of Oglethorpe.

Her whole demeanor thereupon gave Markham such a strong impression that much more must have passed between his brother-in-law and her husband than she reported, that he now used all his endeavors to cross-examine her; but when questioned, she only repeated "that there had been something a little unpleasant," though she rather inconsistently wound up by saying "it would be the *greatest* relief to her, if he (Markham) would go directly to Mr. Oglethorpe's and make inquiries there. Though rather a singular character, he was such an old acquaintance of her husband's, that—that she thought he would (in that place)—be just the person he would apply to, if"—in short she confessed that the name had added to her alarm; and that, though her "extreme anxiety about Sir Edward" might be very foolish, she should feel much indebted to anyone who could certify her without delay that it was groundless." Markham faithfully promised to do anything, everything, that could satisfy her mind; and after Lady Carew had received this assurance, which however—as he did not fail to observe—by no means quieted the nervous agitation she could

barely repress, she took her leave, and returned to the "Hôtel des Bains," there to wait the event with what patience she might.

"Show me the way to Mr. Oglethorpe's, Alexander," said Markham, the moment she was gone. "Is it near here?" continued he, putting the card into his hands.

"Not very far—if you really wish to go there, that is. But we shall be running after each other all day, at this rate; for it's my belief that Oswald has just gone with Swinburne to O'Hara's friend Quin (whose direction I don't know), to see fair play, and that the moment our backs are turned he will be here, wondering what is become of us."

"Well," replied Markham, "his waiting here a few minutes will do no harm, and in the meantime . . . . "

"Why, Lewis," said Alexander, laughing, "you don't pretend to say you have been really frightened with all that fudge? What on earth should old Carew and Oswald quarrel about? Oswald didn't fancy dining there, I know; but for all the baronet was such a pugnacious old cock in his day, I never heard yet of his shooting anyone through the head for not valuing his dinners!"

"Then," said Markham, as they proceeded towards Mr. Oglethorpe's dwelling at a pace which Alexander's late indisposition rendered rather fatiguing to him, "do you know of no cause whatever beyond that confused stuff about invitations, for the 'angry words' which have made that fair lady *so anxious about Sir Edward?* Have

you no idea what took him to the 'Hôtel des Bains' this morning?"

"Not the slightest!—was very much surprised to hear he had been there; but—if you are thinking the old gentleman is jealous of his young wife, you are greatly mistaken; if he were, it's not Oswald he would be falling foul of—no, Desborough's the man for my lady's money, and—I'll tell you what it is, Markham!" cried Alexander, stopping short, "I see it now—her talk, her inquiries about Oswald, are all a sham. The quarrel, if there has been one, is with Fred, you may depend upon it, and she has come to put us on the scent without exactly saying so! If I am right, and she's right," continued Alexander, who was obliged to move on with Markham, who still hastened forwards, "if she's right, and they are gone to settle accounts out on the Downs there, where Duval shot the little German engineer a month back, Fred may have to pay dear for his whistle, for that old fellow is a dead shot, by what I hear; and . . . . "

But by this time they had just reached the corner of the street which led up to Mr. Oglethorpe's abode; and there, lounging by himself, and apparently "thinking of nothing at all," stood Fred Desborough, the living refutation of Alexander's last hypothesis. At sight of Markham he stared, but walked up instantly to shake hands with him and his companion, asking the new comer "if he were fresh from Paris?"

"Not exactly," answered Markham, "I am fresh from just the other direction; but we are in

quest of Oswald, have you come across him anywhere?"

"I! no. Do you think he may have stolen slyly off to the pigeon-shooting, while you staid at home, Alexander?" asked he with a sort of smile.

"Nonsense!" replied young Langton, "you know better; and you would have seen him there if he had."

"No," said Fred coolly, "for I didn't go myself—changed my mind at the last—and have been all day with Madame d'Alby, who says," added he in a half whisper, "that you have not been near her this week past! Are you to be at the supper she gives all her sporting friends to-night?"

"No, I cross to England instead," returned Alexander rather bluntly."

"Oh you do at last!" said Fred with a supercilious nod, and turning from them hastily, he walked off in a contrary direction, with a quick business-like air, rather a contrast to his late lounging attitude. Alexander watched his departure with some surprise, while Markham inquired at the door of Oglethorpe's house if that gentleman were within, and if he had any visitor with him. Mr. Oglethorpe was not at home; had driven out with an English friend who had been there before that day, and who came, the French servant thought, to fetch him. He couldn't say where they were going, but he should rather think into the country. Upon receiving this intelligence, Markham said decisively:

"This may be, as you think, a wild goose chase, Alexander; but I shall take one of these vehicles,

and get driven as fast as I can to the place *she* was evidently thinking of. I can but come back again."

"Oh well, as you choose to go, Lewis, I shall go with you—and to be sure, Quin was to be at the pigeon-shooting, so Oswald can't be at his rooms."

Alexander spoke half sulkily, but with a concerned look which showed he no longer looked on their expedition as so absolutely uncalled for; and they both got into one of the small carriages of which several were at hand, and having given the necessary orders, drove on for some moments in silence, which was broken by Alexander's asking Markham "if he didn't think there was something uncommonly queer in Desborough's look and way when he was speaking to them?"

"He is so much altered in every respect since I last saw him, which was when you had him at Shadworth after that precious scrape of his in the Kingsford theatre, that I can hardly judge; but there certainly *was* something more than off-hand in his manner as he denied all knowledge of Oswald's movements."

"I wish I had asked him how he came to 'change his mind about the pigeon shooting,'" observed Alexander; "Gilmore said he saw him drive off with Sir Edward; and you see *he* went and came back again. Stupid of me not to have run after Fred!"

"You wouldn't have got anything out of him that he didn't choose to tell," returned Markham, who, seeing plainly that his companion was too deficient in general quickness of observation to be able to throw any new light on what was going on,

began to occupy himself in weighing, with as much coolness as his growing anxiety permitted, the one improbability of Lady Carew's terrified looks and manner being (according to Alexander's suggestion) "a sham," against the other improbability of Sir Edward's choosing to pick a quarrel with an acquaintance merely because he had refused his invitations, whether to dine in Boulogne, or to Moreleigh Abbey, in England. Oswald's visit of that morning to the "Hôtel des Bains" too—how was that to be explained?—if, indeed, it had really taken place. "It was a strange business altogether," he observed aloud; and Alexander echoed the remark, though at the same time repeating, "that he felt sure it would turn out to be nothing after all;" and as they drew near the place they were bound to, without seeing or hearing anything to confirm his fears, Markham was beginning to nourish a stronger hope that he had indeed gone on a fool's errand, when, as they approached the last of the straggling houses on their road, Alexander suddenly exclaimed in an alarmed tone: "By Heaven that's Swinburne putting his head out of the doorway there!" He jumped out of the carriage as he spoke, and, followed by Markham, rushed up the steps of the small public house (for such it was), crying out eagerly:

"What *has* brought you here? and where's Oswald?"

Major Swinburne cast on him a very serious, anxious look, and said, placing himself so as to stop the entrance of the new comers into the passage:

"It is as well you are come; I was just going to send for you; for your brother could not (the surgeon told me) be moved farther without putting him to useless torture."

"Then," asked Markham, "he and Sir Edward Carew have met?"

"Yes," answered Swinburne, "they have; Langton fired in the air; Carew's bullet went through his lungs; and it is *not* all over yet; but I should deceive you if I let you think he could last beyond the next hour."

Alexander leaned against the door-post, almost annihilated with surprise and grief; while Markham asked eagerly "if his friend were sensible?"

"I think so," replied Swinburne; "though he has scarcely spoken since he fell; but if your name is Markham, I am charged with something for you."

As he said these words, he took out of his pocket a letter directed to "Lewis Markham, Esq.," adding, as Markham acknowledged the name and received it, "you know, perhaps, better than I, what may have been at the root of this most unhappy affair, which I thought might have been made up on the ground, as it certainly might, had there been no more in it than was on the surface; but neither Sir Edward nor Oglethorpe would listen to my views; nor indeed would poor Langton, who could not, he said, be backward in giving what was asked of him. Sir Edward is off, of course, I don't know in what direction; and your friend is—there."

He pointed to a room at the end of the passage where they stood, adding, "You had better go in

by yourself, while I see what I can do with the brother, who has no more control over his feelings than a child."

Markham obeyed, and on going in saw, with grief and horror unspeakable, the friend whom he had promised to send home, "safe and sound," to his wife and sister, stretched on a bed, motionless, save when occasionally writhing with pain; his eyes closed, and his forehead contracted in a manner which told as much of mental as of bodily anguish. The surgeon, who had just been examining the wound, which bled inwardly, stood by, looking at Markham as he entered, with a countenance that said plainly, "his minutes are counted;" and it seemed, at first, as if the sufferer were too much absorbed in pain to be made conscious of his visitor's approach. But at the touch of Markham's hand, the dying man gradually opened his eyes, and fixing them on him, showed, by a faint gleam of satisfaction, that he knew who it was who bent over him.

"I little thought to find you thus!" ejaculated Markham. At these words Langton's cold fingers pressed those of his friend with all the strength they retained, while he gazed up at him with a look which seemed striving to express what he appeared incapable of speaking. Presently he touched the packet which Markham held in his hand, with a gesture which gave token of his wish it should be opened. Markham accordingly broke the seal, and found enclosed a letter to Katherine, together with the following lines to himself.

"I rely on you, my dear Lewis, for giving the

enclosed to my wife. You and Cecilia will, I know, be true friends to her, both for her own sake and for that of your attached

"OSWALD LANGTON."

After the brief but warm expressions with which Markham assured him that he might in all things depend on him, the wounded man at length gathered up his strength to utter in faint and scarce articulate words, his thanks "for the great kindness shown in thus coming to take his place."

"If it had been but yesterday," said Markham, sorrowfully, "there might have been something to thank for!"

Langton pressed his hand again, but lay silent for some moments, after which he said, firmly and distinctly, while placing his finger on the letter directed to his wife, "Kate and Cecilia will believe me!"

"I too," said Markham, "shall believe whatever account you give of this most fatal quarrel."

Langton looked his acknowledgment; and by this time Alexander, whom Swinburne could no longer detain without, rushed into the room, and throwing himself on his knees beside the bed, gave way to a grief which was embittered by the consciousness that it was his fault that his brother had ever been in Boulogne, to come into collision with Sir Edward Carew. Oswald Langton uttered with difficulty a few words, intended to soothe and comfort him; and then, with a last effort, said to Markham:

"Tell Kate that I died as resignedly as a man

can die who is leaving what I leave—I had thought that winning *her* was a pledge of pardon for ill deeds—it was not so—and—I accept my punishment—trust it may be accepted!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BOUND to his mother by ties of affection which had only been broken by death, and to the sister who idolised him by a feeling which was almost parental, Mrs. Tynedale heard of the violent termination of Oswald Langton's career with an amount of surprise and grief second only to that which came with so stunning a force upon those nearest to him. To write to her god-daughter herself, however, upon an event as dreadful from the causes to which it was publicly attributed as from its nature, seemed impossible; while to remain altogether without news of Shadworth and its afflicted inhabitants appeared yet more so. She therefore addressed her letter of anxious inquiry to a rather nondescript kind of being, once a nurse and now a sort of housekeeper at Shadworth, and usually known by the name of "old Mary." From this person she had learnt in a sufficiently confused epistle, evidently written in great distress of mind, that "master had taken to his bed when he first got the news; that Miss Cecilia (Mrs. Markham that is), and Mrs. Oswald, poor thing, kept up wonderful; and that Miss Cecilia knew what she

(Mary) was doing at that present time, and bid her say she should else have written herself."

A few days later, in answer to farther inquiries, another missive had appeared from old Mary, which stated "that master was better, much better in health, she was thankful to say, and Mrs. Markham not ailing anything except trouble, and being uneasy about poor Mrs. Oswald, who had been very bad since Thursday."

"Now if the Oaklys were not at Malvern," said Mrs. Tynedale to herself, "I should just send and ask Miss Freeman to be so kind as to call upon me, and then I should know whatever they know; but as it is, I suppose I must rest content with old Mary's communications."

"Content" with them however she was so far from being, that she sat considering, late one afternoon, whether after all it would not be best to break the ice with her god-child, by writing her a note, simply asking for an account from *her* both of her father and her sister-in-law.

"In these dire calamities," said she again to herself, "illness in a house often proves (to people who are not called on to labour for their daily bread) a sort of mercy in disguise; for it forces those to do something who could otherwise do nothing, and gives them a subject to speak and write of, in which others can show them sympathy, without touching upon what is unapproachable."

After making these reflections, Mrs. Tynedale was just deferring the move to her writing table till she had finished the last stitches of a row of knitting, when a ring was heard at the door, and instead of Mr. Newman, whom she was expecting

to visit a servant who was rather indisposed, she beheld Lewis Markham. A sharp, but undefined fear of fresh misfortunes shot through her at the sight of him; and in spite of her theory about sickness in the abode of affliction, she was seized with a dread lest Cecilia's strength had given way, and she herself was perhaps wanted at Shadworth. But as civilised people in civilised countries seldom speak out their strongest apprehensions, she merely said, as she took the hand that was silently offered to her:

"I conclude from seeing you that the Oaklys *must* have returned to Wyngate, and that Cecilia told you it would be doing me a kindness if you came on here."

"No," replied Markham, "the Oaklys are not returned; they are still detained at Malvern by that fit of cough, or croup, or pip, or whatever it is, that ails 'baby'—the word was blotted, and I did not give myself much trouble to make it out. I am only thankful for the result, seeing I am determined that, in her present frame of mind, into Shadworth house Mrs. Oakly shall not come. Cecilia has enough to try her as it is, and *she* shall not be driven out of her senses while I am there to prevent it! What has brought me," continued he, "is, that before making trial of some rather desperate remedies, old Foster thinks it right to consult with Newman, who has known Kate's constitution from her childhood; so I started off by the next train to fetch him, and learning at his door that his last visit would be at this house, I came on to save time by waiting for him here. I am pleased it should have so chanced, for I know Cecilia will be

glad (if one may use the word about anything just now) that I should see you!"

"Then," said Mrs. Tynedale, "Kate's illness must be of a very serious nature! Ill, I knew she was, but had not been told—did not understand, at least—that her state was alarming."

"It could hardly be more so," replied Markham.

After these few words, which sounded perhaps even the more hopeless from the calm, collected tone in which they were uttered, there was a silence, during which it is probable that Mrs. Tynedale went over in her own mind whatever her experience suggested of somewhat similar cases, for when she next spoke it was to say:

"These sudden strokes are seldom fatal to *young* people, unless they are so at the first shock —the first moment. When *that* has been survived, danger to life is not often to be apprehended; for, against the crushing effect of the unexpected blow, is to be set the wonderful vigor and elasticity of youth, the powers of which are still fresh, and not worn by the undermining influence of previous sorrow."

"What you say is true," returned Markham; "but you see that, in this instance, though we little thought it, the 'undermining influences' had been long, and what is worse, secretly at work."

"Do you mean then," asked Mrs. Tynedale in a low, hesitating voice, "that she had formed any surmise of what was in fact occupying her—most unhappy—husband? Is it possible that when they parted at Shadworth—almost in my presence—is it possible that she *then* suspected . . ."

"No—no; you mistook me; she had no cause

for such suspicion; what I meant was, that then, and before then—before her marriage, even—she had come to know facts, her acquaintance with which rendered her a prey to constant agitation from the moment she heard of his accidental meeting with Lady Carew."

"His accidental meeting?" repeated Mrs. Tynedale. "Do you—can you—suppose it *was* accidental? The general—the universal belief, I was going to have said—is very different."

"I am aware of it, and I am aware, too, of the impossibility of proving to the generality, what *is* nevertheless the truth, namely, that even as his finding himself in the same city with Lady Carew was purely accidental, so those equivocal meetings, which cost him his life, were literally forced upon him by that capriciously profligate creature, with whom he had, for his bane, been once entangled."

"It is impossible to express the relief I feel in hearing you say that! I could not bear to think of his mother's son as the utterly heartless, utterly depraved being that the renewal of his intrigue with Lady Carew would have shown him to be!"

"Ah, it is not a comfort for you, as it seems to be for Mrs. Oakly, to believe that her son-in-law (whom she now professes to have 'never thoroughly liked'), was not only an erring man, but a positive monster."

"And that poor girl never let drop a word that could give you an idea of what was weighing on her mind?"

"Not a word, not a syllable! He had said 'he depended on her' for keeping that woman's secret from everyone—from Cecilia, even—and it is my

belief that she would have died sooner than let a hint of it pass her lip. It is horrible to look back, now we have the clue, and to feel as if everything, as it went on, *ought* to have enlightened us. We both remember that when we arrived at Shadworth she received us quite cheerfully, and though one might suppose that her estate of a deserted Ariadne was not exactly agreeable to her, still she was ready to exchange her accounts of the English Lakes with ours of the Rhine, and could talk reasonably and without effort of her husband's journey, the necessity for it, etc. It was next morning, after the receipt of his first letter, that the change began; but, as I went off that day to Ashe Grange, I did not see much of it myself, and, truth to speak, it only made me very angry when I learnt, through Cecilia, that Kate was growing more melancholy and more strange every hour, and that each communication from her husband appeared to make her worse. I couldn't tell, nor could Cecilia, that the accounts she was receiving of Lady Carew's determination to force, or entrap, or allure Langton into a renewal of correspondence, were filling that wretched girl with an anxiety and an alarm that devoured her body and soul; and I thought—God forgive me!—that she was just behaving like an impatient child, without any consideration for Cecilia, who had only a great deal too much for her. I did certainly see, when I got back from Ashe Grange (where I was kept longer than I originally intended), that the alteration in her appearance was dreadful; though, as I had not suspected her of affectation, but only of a weak selfish abandon-

ment to her feelings, I must confess that the sight did not make the impression on me which it ought, and that I at first resisted Cecilia's entreaties that, as the time of Oswald's return continued so uncertain, I should offer to take his place. I should not have gone indeed, had it not chanced (fortunately for me and my feelings at this day) that old Foster dropped in to say something to Cecilia about the new hospital at Kingsford, and, though he only saw Kate for a few minutes, observed a peculiarity in the whole look of her which so struck his experienced eye that he actually made a pretext for calling Cecilia out of the room, in order to draw her attention to it. Of course, when it was repeated to me that Foster had said that he had *never*, in the whole course of his practice, known anyone wear such an expression of countenance without the existence of some very serious mischief, mental or bodily, I was conquered; and, though I still thought her state of mind in a great measure her own fault, I was a good deal mollified before I started, by seeing the desperate effort she made over herself, at first, to refuse my offer. The wonder is, now we know that her letter of that morning told of Lady Carew's daring visit to her husband, and of the extremity of her brother's violence, the wonder *now* is how she could make such an effort at all, or how, in the state of nervous agitation in which she continued during the whole time of my absence, she could yet maintain silence. Now that Foster knows the whole story, he says he believes she would have had a sharp fit of illness, even if her husband had come back alive and well. I don't

know that I quite enter into all his medical reasons for being so sure of that; but I do understand that body and mind were both so overtried then that there is the less chance for her now."

"And in what manner," said Mrs. Tynedale, after a long pause, "in what manner did she, after all, receive the fearful tidings you were forced to announce to her?"

"There was no announcement needed; I was spared that. The fact was, she *saw* me arrive, and that sight so confirmed her worst forebodings, that she met me with the look and bearing of one who has already acquired the certainty of a long-expected misfortune, of which the particulars only remain to be learnt. When she had heard all, she said with a steadiness and distinctness that nearly took my breath away, 'I knew when we married that some evil was surely awaiting him; but I thought that, whatever it were, his wife must share it.' I *had* thought her pitifully weak; afterwards I took up a contrary mistake; for when, instead of yielding herself up to the usual workings of sorrow, she employed the very hour in which she was made aware of her bereavement in getting together all the letters she had received from Boulogne, and showing them to my wife, I certainly believed her to be gifted not only with more than ordinary fortitude, but with more than ordinary strength and bodily power of endurance. She said 'she needed nothing to convince *herself* that Oswald loved her and was true to her, but that she should not be able to bear her existence, unless she made his sister see and understand all

that could best justify him and console her.' And a consolation indeed it was to poor Cecilia, after the bewildering doubt and horror, for the removing of which *I* could do so little, to receive those explanations of her brother's conduct which Kate alone could furnish, and to be enabled to share the comfort *she* found in his expressions of sincere repentance for past sins, and desire of well-doing if life were spared to him. All these things were brought forward with perfect calmness; and with the same apparent calmness she took her share in attending upon Mr. Langton, whose state during the first night gave everyone great uneasiness. Next morning, when he had rallied considerably, she showed that she had already thought of plans for the future, inasmuch as she expressed her hope of being allowed to be *his* daughter, and to make his home her home, since 'to her own,' she said, 'it would be impossible for her to return.' But it was in speaking afterwards on this same subject, and in the sort of nervous dread she exhibited of again seeing her mother, that Cecilia tells me she first noticed some departure from her previous composure; and that afternoon, when Cecilia was begging her forgiveness, as it were, for having been the means of leading her into a marriage which had brought her nothing but misery, I myself observed that there was something more than vehement, almost startling, in the tone in which she bade her 'never say that again!—it was her best consolation to have been Oswald's wife—to bear his name, to be free to mourn him life long!' She grew calm again however, and in spite of having had to undergo

the ordeal of seeing Spencer, who came over from the Moat, in a state you may imagine, she continued to be composed in manner till the middle of the next day, *after* the receipt of a letter from Mrs. Oakly, which she tore up with a convulsive jerk of the fingers, and did not show to Cecilia, though she said, at the same time, 'that poor mamma was terribly afflicted.' But though the general contents of the letter remained unknown, it soon became evident that 'poor mamma' had made some allusion to the newspapers and the reports contained in them; for before five minutes were out, Kate asked me for that of the preceding day. I said it was not in the room (I had locked it up). She begged me to fetch it; and I then thought it best to tell her honestly that I had put it away because I did not wish either Cecilia or her to see it. She urged that her mother had told her there were things in it that ought to be contradicted, and—to make a long story short—she insisted so vehemently, told me so positively 'that if I did not give her that one, she should send in to Kingsford to buy another,' that I was even forced to put the paper into her hands. You saw it of course, and doubtless remember what it contained; that is, a column and a half devoted to three different accounts of 'The late Fatal Duel at Boulogne,' filled up, according to the fancy of each individual writer, with every variety of the current reports most calculated to cast discredit on poor Langton's memory, the only assertion in which these correctly informed persons agreed being 'that he was well known to have been under great pecuniary obligations to Sir Edward.' Foster says it only hastened

matters, and that, with a woman who had neither eaten, nor slept, nor wept at all since her loss, and but very little for a long while beforehand, the result was as inevitable as the apple's falling to the ground. Whether he only says that to comfort us, I can't tell; but I know the immediate effect was terrible. Of course no reasoning being, above fifteen, could be ignorant of the probability of such judgments being passed (and that without supposing malice at work) upon any onewho had come to a similar end under similar circumstances; but alive as Kate was to the dread of her husband's conduct being misinterpreted by friends, of *public* censure she had been, till then, too much absorbed by sorrow to think—much less to familiarize her mind with what it was likely to be. I saw she was shaking from head to foot as she read; but she went on nevertheless, and when she had gone through the whole, she turned to me and asked, 'What ought to be done?' I hesitated, I could not answer; and she asked again 'if I did not think it would be right to contradict such utterly false statements?' I said that with regard to the money obligation it should, if she pleased, be done; as to the rest—I don't know in what form of words I put my reply—but she took in the sense of them, for her cheeks, which had been as pale as death, flushed deeply, and she said in a quick, abrupt way, 'I understand you: you mean that when a man has once erred as he had, it is no use debating in the public prints about the more or the less. I daresay you are right; it must just be borne; I shall write and tell mamma so.' Write, however, she could not (she was unable to steady

her hand), and from thenceforth I may say she was never quiet a moment. It was in vain that we tried to stop the rapid, eager talk in which, with dry eyes and erect form, she alternately poured forth praises of her husband, and bitter complaints of Lady Carew's falseness and unabashed pursuit of him. I remember her saying, more than once, 'If I don't tell you these things now, perhaps I never shall; and let others think as they will, I must prevent *you* from believing the worst of him!' Every attempt to tranquillize her was fruitless; she hurried on with a wild impetuosity that alarmed us more and more; fever came on at night, and by morning she knew nobody."

"One can hardly tell," said Mrs. Tynedale after awhile, "whether it is her life or her death one should pray for."

"No," replied Markham, "and though Cecilia goes on—like herself—hoping against hope, and unable to bear the thought of seeing her snatched away, she does not yet fully know all the further trials that await that poor girl if ever she recovers health and reason."

"What *do* you mean?" cried Mrs. Tynedale, "What other horrors are there beyond what I know already?"

"I mean," returned Markham, "that I have had, from the first, a strong impression (which is every day growing more into a conviction) that for all Lady Carew's reckless imprudence, Sir Edward would have gone on the same blind buzzard as ever, had it not been for—Fred Desborough!"

"If it be indeed so," said Mrs. Tynedale, gravely, "I trust that God may in his mercy remove the sister to a better world ere she learns what *must* bring her to hate her brother, and would utterly divide her from her mother, who can see no fault in him."

"I believe I must say amen to that prayer," said Markham.

"And what has brought you to believe this?" inquired Mrs. Tynedale.

"No positive, precise evidence, of course; but even before leaving Boulogne, amid all the doubt and bewilderment of that terrible day, the idea had flashed through me; and now I have come to know that that boy's violence and hatred had carried him so far as to attempt, by every insult in his power, to goad his brother-in-law into fighting with *him*, I have been less and less able to get quit of the notion that he brought about his having to do so with Sir Edward! For I take it that the young lover must have seen something farther than the old husband, and that it was *he* who fired the train that has dealt destruction around! You are the first person to whom I have eased my mind by saying so much; but I know my surmises will be safe with you, and that *if* they should prove unfounded, Cecilia will never learn them here. If on the other hand I am right, it will be only too sure to ooze out. Not that he will boast of it, I should think; though I gather that he has written from Brussels (whither it seems he followed old Carew!) a most virtuously indignant letter to his mother, which has not tended to diminish her bitter feeling against Langton. If she retains the same mood

with regard to him, I doubt if she and Cecilia can ever meet again; she is so incapable of reserve or self-command, so credulous, so indiscreet! and as to her poor daughter, even if Newman and Foster combined were to work what would be little short of a 'miracle of healing,' I believe ten minutes of her mother's company would more than undo everything."

"I should certainly expect it to do so," said Mrs. Tynedale. "But all this time," continued she, "you have never told me how my dear Cecilia is! I know that if she were still Cecilia Langton, I should be beginning to fear lest I might have to calculate the chances of outliving my god-child, as well as my neighbour's child; but now that she has other hopes, nearer interests than even those of a daughter and a sister, I trust to them, under Providence, for supporting her till the hour comes when we may look to her reviving to happiness."

"I do what I can to prevent her from overworking herself," replied Markham, "and as she is perfectly well in health, and has what may be termed the blessing of her eyes being a perfect 'fountain of tears,' I do indeed hope that she may walk unharmed through all these trials. I am able, in a great measure, to take the charge of her father off her hands, and when Henry comes . . ."

"So Henry is coming! better late than never," said Mrs. Tynedale.

"Yes, he left Venice on hearing, by a letter from me, what had happened. I don't know if it has occurred to him, as I am afraid it has to most other people, that if he had been at hand, Oswald need not have gone on the errand that has proved

so fatal; but putting that out of the question, he will see, if Cecy shows him some of the last Boulogne letters, some allusions to himself which may cause him to reflect in time, and some good may come out of evil if he turns to any plan of life which includes duties and employments, instead of his late idle and unprofitable existence. His letter to his sister expresses great feeling, and good feeling—if it only lasts. But I was going to say that when he has been at Shadworth a day or two, and Cecilia has got over the agitation of first seeing him, I shall, if I can, leave him to supply my place, and go myself to look after poor Alexander. You know I could not do otherwise than leave him behind at Boulogne with Swinburne, who has been a good friend to him in his affliction, which was even more overwhelming than you would suppose. Swinburne has indeed carried his kindness so far as to take him, when he himself came over with his nephew and niece, to his mother's; for he felt, he said, that the poor fellow was too wretched to be left alone, while at the same time his coming to Shadworth would only have been an increase of misery to all parties. So it is at Mrs. Swinburne's I mean to join him, and then see him on board the 'Plantagenet,' where I expect to be able to introduce him to some friends of mine, whose notice may help to strengthen his good resolutions; for though he says he is 'an altered man, and sobered for life,' he will need every prop and support that can be given him, when the day comes, as of course it will come, for the revival of youthful spirits."

"I believe he is good-hearted," said Mrs. Tyne-

dale;" but he was so much indulged in childhood (the usual fate of the youngest), and is besides so inferior in capacity to his brothers, that it was not surprising he should also be inferior to them in that mixture of principle and self-respect which keeps a man out of debt, and out of *low* profligacy; I trust he may now be in a way to take up principle of a higher kind, built on a higher foundation. If he adheres to it, he may yet do well; and for that well doing he will have to thank you—you—and Oswald."

Mrs. Tynedale sat for some moments buried in thought; when she broke silence, it was to say, looking full at Markham as she spoke:

"If you and Cecy have children one of these days, Lewis, do not—even if you should lose your wealth—tell your sons, as my poor friend Mr. Langton did, 'that marriage is out of the question for them.' The doctrine has its convenience, I daresay; but I verily believe that if Oswald had not set out in life imbued with the prejudices and fastidiousnesses (of more kinds than one) which the father had been at pains to inspire him with, he would not have been hanging loose on the world at twenty-nine, and would have been engaged or married before he ever saw the face of that woman who has been his destruction."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"FROM LEWIS MARKHAM TO MRS. TYNEDALE.

"*Shadworth*, 28*th August.*

"MY DEAR MRS. TYNEDALE,

"After the accounts you have been receiving from Cecilia for the last fortnight, it will be no surprise to you to learn that Kate Langton breathed her last about five this morning. She passed away quietly, and in a sort of slumber, into which she had fallen after nearly two hours of tranquillity, during which Cecilia fancies (though *I* do not) that she was in some degree conscious. How *she* will bear up, now that the motive for exertion is at an end, remains to be seen; but it is a hopeful sign that at this present moment she is asleep on the sofa opposite, and if that Heaven-sent restorative be but granted her for an hour or two more, it will do much to repair her powers after the increased fatigue and watching of the last two days and nights. If I find, when the funeral is over, that she is equal to the journey, it is my purpose to take her at once to Ashe Grange, leaving Mr. Langton here, for the time being, with Henry. I know that the present are not favorable circum-

stances for her visiting her future home, and that she will go there merely in obedience to me; but if she can only bear the move, I expect it to prove beneficial. I believe, however, that it will have a better chance of being so, if you, in your kindness, would now renew the offer you have so repeatedly made, and which Cecilia was forced to refuse (on account of Mrs. Oakly), of coming over and taking up your abode, for awhile, in this melancholy house. When Cecilia has seen you and talked to you, I shall have better hopes of change having power to raise her out of the state of dejection, which *here* could only increase from the cessation of the sad duties which have filled up her time for the last three weeks. I believe you know that Henry's being established here, and his ready willingness to be everything one could wish to his father and sister, enabled me, about a week back, to execute my plan of accompanying Alexander to Plymouth; he was much affected at parting from me, and again and again repeated his assurances that henceforth his family, whom he had cost so dear, should have no cause to be ashamed of him. I hear—perhaps you have also heard—that my *impression* respecting Fred Desborough's conduct, is now that of the world in general. On that subject of course (as on all those connected with the affair) the wildest and most improbable tales are in circulation; but in the main point—in the point, that is, of his having been the person deliberately to open old Carew's eyes—I now know them to be correct, since I have it on the authority of Swinburne, who has learnt from the Scudamores that such is the fact. The story they tell is

almost as inexplicable to me as the unaccredited versions, being somehow connected with the production of an old pocket-book, which Desborough had, they say, picked out of a ditch! But whatever the token may have been, and whencesoever he procured it, it is certain that its effect was instantaneous and decisive. What the result would be, was perfectly well known to Desborough, who is, and must ever be accounted, as much the murderer of his brother-in-law as if he had hired bravoes to stab him in the street. These reports concerning their nephew have ere this reached his uncles, and also his mother, who, though she as yet persists in believing that whatever is said against her son is false and slanderous, is, I take it, destined to the misery of seeing that his base and dishonorable actions have already irretrievably injured him in the opinion of all men who have a character to lose, and that the consequences of this feeling are likely (in spite of his wealth) to stand in the way of his future career to an extent which his family must on every ground look on as disastrous. It has been—even as I foresaw—through Mrs. Oakly (in one of her incoherent letters) that Cecilia became aware of facts, her acquaintance with which obliged me to tell her in so many words that her brother's death, albeit dealt him by the hand of one he had undoubtedly injured, had been contrived by the head of the boy whom *she* had known from his cradle, and whom *he* had, not so many months before, saved from ruin and disgrace. What it was for me to give and for her to receive this information, I need not say; you

can imagine it only too well. I must nevertheless acknowledge as a blessing that Mrs. Oakly, even when enabled by circumstances to leave Malvern, did not prove determined on braving her husband's opinion (which coincided with mine) of the inexpediency of attempting to nurse, or even see her poor daughter. Had she done so, and absolutely persisted in it, I must, in spite of all my resolutions, have withdrawn my opposition; and I am therefore thankful that her sorrow rather took the helpless, hopeless turn of bewailing her yet living child as one already in the grave, and of declaring that the sight of her face would be an affliction beyond *her* powers of endurance. I ought to warn you that, if you are indeed kind enough to visit us, you must expect to find Mr. Langton greatly altered; he is no longer ill precisely, nor is he so prostrated by affliction as to be unable to speak of other things; but in gait, in countenance, and in the remarkable whitening of his hair, he is more aged than I ever saw anyone in the time. I wonder whether he has ever looked back, ever reflected upon that chain of cause and effect which was full in your mind when we held our melancholy conversation this day fortnight! A word or two he said to me yesterday, while discussing certain plans for Henry, which I hope, ere long, to see realized, inclines me to suspect that he has.

"Ever yours,
"LEWIS MARKHAM."

THE END.

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